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Racial Battle Fatigue and Black Male Higher Education Administrators

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Abstract

Racial Battle Fatigue was first coined by Dr. William A. Smith as a theory describing the burnout of African Americans in higher education institutions. While much of the current research focuses on the faculty and student experiences, in various formats, this provides an autoethnography capturing the various phases of a Black Male higher education administrators experience with experiencing and coping through Racial Battle Fatigue. The belief behind this approach focuses on the value of storytelling and autoethnography in particular in research, the interconnected nature of life experiences that impact professional life as well as the reverse, and a call to addressing individual and institutional behaviors to help mitigate this experience amongst Black male higher education administrators. In addition, the goal of this research is to increase the focus on higher education administrator experiences as a significant percentage of college and university communities. The structure of this study is in line with traditional dissertation standards of an introductory chapter, review of the literature, methodologies chapter, and a significant portion dedicated to connecting the narratives to the research.

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Finding my way back to my PhD program at the University of Missouri-St. Louis was a long winding journey. While most people do not take 10 years to complete this effort alone, that was my path. And this is my story. As with most stories, mine is filled with characters with pseudonyms, antagonists and heroes alike in my eyes. I learned somewhere along the way that no one gets through this life journey, and I am no exception. I'd like to thank the following people who stand out as my life's journey partner to whom I could not have completed this effort:

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CONTENTS

<u>Chapter 1- Introduction</u>	1
<u>Career Realigning</u>	6
<u>Theoretical Framework</u>	8
<u>Racial Battle Fatigue</u>	8
<u>Invisible Tax</u>	9
<u>Critical Questions</u>	10
<u>Purpose/Rationale</u>	11
<u>Methodology</u>	11
<u>Significance</u>	13
<u>Delimitations and Limitations</u>	13
<u>Chapter 2- Literature Review</u>	15
<u>Introduction</u>	15
<u>Job Burnout and Racial Battle Fatigue</u>	16
<u>Microaggressions</u>	17
<u>Race and Mental Health</u>	19
<u>Inside Higher Education: RBF and Invisible Tax</u>	20
<u>Black Misandry and RBF</u>	25
<u>Heuristics</u>	27
<u>Summary</u>	28
<u>Chapter 3- Methods</u>	30
<u>Introduction</u>	30
<u>Research Design and Rationale</u>	31
<u>Research Design and Data Collection</u>	33
<u>Data Analysis</u>	34
<u>Organization</u>	36
<u>Reliability and Validity</u>	38
<u>Generalizability</u>	39

<u>Limitations</u>	39
<u>Summary</u>	39
<u>Chapter 4- Formation Experiences</u>	41
<u>Introduction</u>	41
<u>Family Life and Trauma</u>	41
<u>Junior High School and Early Surveillance</u>	47
<u>Repetitive Events in High School</u>	50
<u>The College Experience</u>	54
<u>Discussion</u>	57
<u>Impact of Early Trauma</u>	57
<u>Youth Encounters with Racism</u>	59
<u>Hypersurveillance</u>	60
<u>Higher Education and New Forms of Microaggressions</u>	62
<u>Conclusion</u>	63
<u>Chapter 5- Career Experiences</u>	64
<u>Introduction</u>	64
<u>First Job Experiences</u>	64
<u>“Token Black Guy”</u>	65
<u>The Police Reenter</u>	67
<u>More Title, More Policing</u>	71
<u>Hypersurveillance Continued</u>	75
<u>More Title, Less Power</u>	78
<u>The Old Boys Club</u>	79
<u>Staff Revolt</u>	80
<u>Weaponizing Black Maleness</u>	83
<u>Discussion</u>	86

<u>Powerlessness</u>	86
<u>Power</u>	87
<u>Career Surveillance</u>	90
<u>Chapter 6- Racial Battle Fatigue: Before and After</u>	92
<u>Introduction</u>	92
<u>The Beginning of the End</u>	92
<u>Personal and Professional Overload</u>	93
<u>Trouble at Work</u>	94
<u>The Best Thing</u>	97
<u>Life after Burnout</u>	99
<u>Coping Differently</u>	103
<u>Even the Police Can't Stop Me Now</u>	104
<u>Car Break In</u>	106
<u>The Last Personal Straw</u>	108
<u>Discussion</u>	110
<u>Black Male Manager Experiences</u>	112
<u>Leadership and Hypersurveillance</u>	113
<u>Change</u>	114
<u>Chapter 7- Discussion and Conclusion</u>	117
<u>Introduction</u>	117
<u>Autoethnography</u>	118
<u>RBF and its Manifestation</u>	120
<u>Coping Mechanisms</u>	121

Other Interesting Themes	122
Potential for Future Research	124
References	127

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 2013, I experienced a form of burnout that left me confused and at the lowest point of my personal professional life. I decided to leave a professional position as a higher education administrator amidst a medical leave of absence due to depression brought on by a hostile work environment matched by a divorce. There were many problematic behaviors I encountered and engaged in which left me confused and emotionally injured. While there were many resources I leveraged to get back on track (e.g. counseling, group meetings, friends), I had to walk away from my doctoral pursuit at the University of Missouri St. Louis two classes short of completing my coursework. Seemingly, I was failing at every part of my academic, personal, and professional life. Through these support systems, I was able to work through two job changes and various problematic behavioral choices in order to get back on track. With my professional and personal life stabilizing, I began to pursue the prospect of returning to finish my studies with my PhD advisor in 2018. Much of our time focused on securing my readmission while reading large quantities of scholarly literature on issues of interest to me. This exploration of the research led me to reflect on my life's experiences as the related to the literature. The theme of interest which surfaced was the need to make sense of what I had experienced during the low point mentioned above. This led me to an exploration of various forms of burnout.

Burnout can be experienced in a variety of work environments, including higher education. For Black higher education administrators, stress related to their work environment may take many forms, including Racial Battle Fatigue. Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF) was introduced by Dr. William A. Smith in 2003. It describes the physiological,

emotional, and psychological toll faced by Black faculty (and students) leading to a range of symptoms and behaviors that are deleterious to the individual experiencing the symptoms (Harris & Linder, 2014). While much of the research and literature has focused on faculty and students, this framework may have application for higher education administrators as well. Student Affairs, Student Services, and Student Personnel are often used interchangeably to describe higher education administrative roles, which make up “divisions or departments which provide services and student support in higher education” (Ciobanu, 2013, p. 170). These positions can include academic advising, residence life, student leadership group advising, among many other roles. As a Black higher education administrator, I’ve spent most of my career in increasingly responsible roles in higher education administrative positions in residential life, student leadership development, and admissions & recruitment. While there are a large number of peer reviewed journals covering the field of higher education administration, there are very few articles that address RBF in the profession. My interest in RBF is related to my personal experience with this phenomenon and curiosity about others who may have experienced the same. While many of these experiences with RBF are a result of a collection of mundane interactions with racial microaggressions (Smith et al., 2012), my experience with racism did not begin in the professional world.

I am the middle of five children to a Ugandan born single mother. Raised in southern California, I had very little sense of the existence of race and poverty, but I was introduced to racism as one of my earliest childhood recollections. Four of the five youngest siblings in my family (which included me) were students at Green Valley Day Care Center in Southern California. Part of this program included staff walking those of

us who were in grades kindergarten through 6th grade to the local elementary school and picking us up after class. I was in the 1st grade in 1981, and a friend of mine invited me to his house to play. I said yes and walked with him home directly after school. After some time of playing at his home, I could sense that his mother was uneasy of an unknown child at her home. Looking back, I could understand her dilemma. I decided to walk in the direction of my day care, which was several blocks away. I was surprised and relieved that my memory got me within a couple blocks of the day care as the scenery of suburban streets with tree lined yards began to look increasingly familiar. As I neared the daycare, a boy, likely in his early teens, and a girl were walking in my direction. He had his arm draped over her shoulders with his dirty blond middle length hair flowing over his eyes. They seemed to be smiling holding onto each other as we approached each other heading in opposite directions. Then the boy said something, a word I had never heard at that point in my life. "Hey nigger..." he greeted me before she quickly told him to stop "hush up." They both laughed as they continued to walk past me. I wasn't sure what that word was, and I was more afraid of the trouble I realized I was going to be in as I entered the daycare. After some reprimanding by one of the staff, my siblings and I were picked up by my father who was still married to my mother at this point of our lives. Later that evening, I told my father what the boys about this episode, including what the boy had said to me. My father had a very serious look on his face. I couldn't interpret if he was angry, sad, or any other emotion. What I did see in the deep creases of his face was a stern silence. He looked away from me for a moment, then turned to me and said, "That's not a good word. We don't use that word." I knew something was horribly wrong, but my father did not let on to the world of experiences awaiting me. Maybe he was

appropriately protecting my six year old innocence. Maybe he just did not know what the appropriate response was. I'm not sure what the appropriate response could or should have been, but this experience resonated with me, along with increasing experiences of bigotry as the years went by in southern California. It would not be my last experience with racism.

In 2013, everything in many areas of my life came to an immediate halt. For the first time in an eleven year career, I resigned from a professional position as a director at a university in St. Louis, Missouri. Prior to this experience, my career track trajectory seemed to be moving at a fast pace towards increasingly responsible leadership positions. I was hired by the Vice President for Student Affairs immediately after my new supervisor, the Assistant Vice President (Derek), was hired. We were able to interview over the phone prior to the final offer, and I was excited about the possibility for working for a person of color for the first time in a professional position. Derek had risen through the ranks in higher education, and as a Filipino immigrant, we had several areas in common in our personal and professional journey. I anticipated that Derek would be a great supervisor and mentor for me. Unfortunately, our relationship did not match this expectation. Immediately, his authoritarian and demanding tone showed up in his request for me to give up a professional staff budget fund to another department. This seemed to gain him favor politically with that department leader. He subsequently began a series of critiques of my performance on a regular basis, while making demands for my leadership style to match his with other campus partners. This included directives to dominate and direct other chief officers in campus security and facilities management in the form of demanding various performance requests of their staffs. As I will share in later chapters,

his demanding demeanor towards me wore away at my confidence in a way that took an emotional toll. I began to struggle with the criticism and his imprudent efforts to motivate me through criticism. After a series of challenging interactions with Derek, I decided to resign from my position without the security of a new job for the first time in my professional career. I walked away from the most money I made to being jobless and incurring growing debt. There were many experiences during this time of my life. I felt a familiar sensations of the poverty my family experienced as I was growing up. I recalled hearing stories of colleagues and mentors taking professional risks in resetting their lives, while walking away from their careers. What I experienced in doing this was a series of personal, professional, emotional, and financial strains needing resolution. As a single father of a fourteen year old son, there seemed to be not enough time to regroup and get back on my career track. During the 6 months of unemployment, I exhausted my severance package provided by my former employer along with my retirement plan. I was drinking heavily to self-medicate, which only exacerbated the problems I was facing. After a series of events that started 2 years earlier, including concluding a second divorce, several drunken altercations, the use of illegal narcotics (several for the first time), and being jobless, I was rapidly moving the opposite direction in life than the one I started in my career. I clearly recall my son being due to be with me for the upcoming week, yet I had no food to feed him. After nearly exhausting all of my financial resources, I found myself at a foodbank that allowed me to come in during their off hours. There was a Black man in his 50s who greeted me at the side door of the church. After pulling a small amount of canned goods together, and handing them to me, he must have seen the desperation in my face. He returned to the food supplies and gave me triple the original

amount of food, including frozen items. At that moment, I immediately thought to myself that I could not believe I was in this position. As a youth, I watched my single mother work two jobs while receiving food aid to take care of her five children. Here I was just months earlier with two Master's degrees and earning more of an annual salary than she did in her entire career. Yet, the cycle of poverty seemingly found its way to me. Self-doubt instantly settled in. Was this my destiny? Was this experience inevitable based on my background? Maybe I had been lucky earlier in my life and this was just reality rearing its head to bring me back to my place. I was relieved I had enough food for my son for now, angry for the mistakes I was making, embarrassed at what my life had become, and afraid of what the future had for me. This was a temporary relief, and this man provided it with his time with me. My life at this point had transitioned from my earlier career goals to something totally different than expected. After having an fulfilling educational experience followed by career success, this period of my life required some reevaluation of my personal and professional goals.

Career Realignment

Initially, I wanted to be a college or university president. That was my goal when I started my career in 2002. This time away from higher education allowed me to process my goals along with my experiences in higher education. Initially, I blamed others for my professional misfortunes that led me to the decision to walk away. After some deep reflection, aided by group meeting settings and counseling, I began looking inward for answers as to why I was in the current jobless position, along with why I wanted to be a president in the first place. The initial answers I concluded were purely self-serving. While I have since returned to this goal of becoming a college president, I held onto this

belief of my original goals and eventually moved into a nonprofit leadership role doing college access work with youth and their families in the St. Louis area. This work was driven by one of my original professional educational goals of getting youth from impoverished backgrounds into college and keeping them on the road to graduation. This work was challenging, exciting, heartbreaking, and rewarding. After some change in leadership at the nonprofit I was working for, I decided to walk away. This time, I was focused on returning to higher education with a different understanding of the challenges facing young people entering higher education. I was not certain why I wanted to return to higher education, but it was an environment where I believed I could contribute to the experience of student success.

Returning to higher education in a lower rung management role was humbling, but it allowed time to master a new area in enrollment management, supervision, and deeper reflection on my personal goals. Within the 4 years of returning to higher education, I received a promotion and several financial raises. This all concluded with an additional promotion back into a director role that goes into effect in July 2020. Seemingly, I was (and still am) on a track up the ranks. What also changed was my returning interest into a presidency in a higher education institution as a career goal. Around this same time, I returned to self-reflections on career and life. The two seemed so intertwined and I became curious about what things led to my journey unfolding the way it had so far. Around the same time, I began my process of returning to the University of Missouri- St. Louis PhD program in Educational Leadership & Policy Studies. This allowed me to explore literature on higher education and burnout. What unfolded under the many months of preparation for reentering the PhD program was my

awareness of the literature on Racial Battle Fatigue. I am certain what I experienced was some form of burnout in the low moment of my personal and professional life. What's even more apparent is that there were factors prior to my professional career that may have hastened this professional burnout. Higher education institutions were not the first place where I experienced racist interactions with policy, law enforcement, and interpersonal interactions. These experience cannot be separated as they informed my psychological, emotional, and physical wellness prior to my career. Through the theoretical frame of Racial Battle Fatigue, this study will analyze the events and connect them to the wider cultural context.

Theoretical Framework

Racial Battle Fatigue

Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF) examines “psychosocial stress responses (e.g. frustration, sadness, shock, anger, defensiveness, apathy, academic disidentification, hypersensitivity, hypervigilance, anxiety, irritability, depression, and feelings of helplessness or hopefulness)” (Smith et al., p. 190). One argument may be made that all professions have individuals who experience some form of burnout, thus there may be little relevance to the importance of researching this topic. While this may partly be true, it does not preclude the importance of exploring higher education further in this capacity. Research on burnout work outside of the higher education has some added value in providing not only a wider understanding but potential ideas for addressing the issue.

Burnout in all occupations is described “as a state of exhaustion which may occur in a very wide range of occupational contexts in which employees become cynical in

relation to their work and experience decreased professional efficacy” (Golonka et al., 2018, p. 229). In their study, they investigated the connection of anxiety and depression to occupational burnout. They contend “burnout is linked to impairments in cognitive functioning and impacts that mental and physical health of employees” (Golonka et al., 2018, p. 230). These characteristics share much of what the literature describes with RBF. Their research identified factors to measure, such as workload, control, reward, fairness, community, and values. One important note was that depression and anxiety were not considered causes of burnout. In other words, preexisting conditions like these were necessarily predictors of burnout. However, the consequences of the six aforementioned factors seem to match up with the research on RBF (Smith et al., 2016).

From systemic and institutionalized existence, to the microaggressions experienced by many people of color in higher education, all forms of racism are experienced by students, faculty, and staff. It may be tempting to jump towards finding solutions to “teach” people how to deal with multiple effects of these experiences. If the solutions were that simple, there would be no need for the literature. The research is mixed on the impact of racism. While a growing body of research has made the connections between racial discrimination and negative mental health impacts, “others have yielded null findings” (Metzger et al., 2018, p. 490). It remains worthwhile to explore these concepts in the higher education sphere to gain more clarity.

Invisible Tax

The energies associated with dealing with racism in the form of what’s referred to as an *invisible tax*. Givens (2016) states “the invisible tax that Black students pay manifests through the mental, physical, and emotional resources that they could allocate

to initiatives that promote academic and extracurricular success, but instead utilize to merely survive as students in a racially hostile campus environment” (p. 62). When focused on the experience of college and university students, faculty, and staff, multiple problems surface. This shows up in several ways. Faculty and staff take on additional responsibilities of mentoring and assisting students (and each other) in navigating environments that are hostile to their racial identity (Givens, 2016). Black students find it necessary to create and maintain support for their peers as largely important beyond the walls of higher education. This taxation also takes form in the psychological energy in the form of “‘anger,’ ‘anxiety,’ and ‘stress’” (Givens, 2016, p. 71) when dealing with racism on campuses. Givens states “This is a tax that is both self-imposed for survival purposes, and imposed upon them by an institutional climate that neglects their needs as students in a variety of ways” (Givens, 2016, p. 62). This additional energy and time on top of responsibilities shared by all students, faculty, and staff creates an unbalanced experience that may connect to the mental and physical toll paid.

Critical Questions

Burnout can be associated with many areas of personal and professional life. One area I have interest in exploring is college administrators who’ve experience a specific form of burnout: Racial Battle Fatigue. The critical research questions I have are:

- What are the stories that contributed to my experience with Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF) as a Black male higher education administrators?
- In what ways did I cope with my experience of RBF?

Purpose/Rationale

The purpose of this study is to explore the existence of RBF related to Black male higher education administrators. Additionally, it aims to explore ways that individuals, groups, and institutions can help minimize the impact of this experience. In navigating my career as a higher education administrator for the last 17 years, I've observed dissatisfaction and burnout among higher education administrators of color. I've personally experienced such dissatisfaction and burnout as well. Thus, I decided to investigate how individuals experience with these issues to make a further the current work on Racial Battle Fatigue. The findings from this research could be useful to:

- new and seasoned higher education administrators of color;
- key administrators interested in improving the experience and promotion process of Black male administrators, and
- higher education preparation programs training future generations of Black higher education administrators.

Methodology

In finding my own voice as a writer, autoethnography is the approach I implemented through this study. Autoethnography “emphasizes the lived experience of the researcher to access culture as communicative accomplishment” (Bolen, 2017, p. 73). It is a reflexive writing process where the writer moves back and forth between recollections, memories, storytelling, and culture through more academic forms of analysis and meaning making. Ellis and Bochner (2000) describe a process of zooming “backward and forward, inward and outward” where “distinctions between personal and

cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition” (p. 739). Through a series of narratives in my experience as a higher education administrator, I will provide the content for this study through my recollections of several stages of my life prior to and throughout my professional career. The cultural interpretation of these experience will aim to share a story that the reader can be exposed to or connect with. Finally, the autoethnographic analysis in line with recommendations by Chang (2008).

An idea is consistently shared among a range of authors referring to this approach to research is that it requires a vulnerability in share the author’s own story while sharing this same narrative voice (Bolen, 2017; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Forber-Pratt, 2015). Through this work, I will explore conditions that led to my professional burnout and connect it to the theoretical framework of RBF. The practice of recalling experiences, journaling, and self-reflection on feelings will be the beginning point for analysis and meaning making. The goal of this dissertation may have self-healing outcomes, but this is not the goal. The goal of this work is to understand an experience and how it connects to a larger cultural phenomenon (RBF) in a largely unexplored population (Black male higher education administrators).

For this study, I typed sets of stories to capture three phases of my life and career. These phases representative stories from before my career started, stories in the early to middle part of my career, and stories working through my experience with RBF. I then went through a second round of utilizing the Microsoft Word voice dictation technology to record these stories so they would be captured in text automatically. Again, I focused on the previously mentioned phases of my life and career. This second stage was challenging due to the technology not accurately capturing my voice as well as lacking

the ability to add punctuation which required manually correcting this group of text. The result of these two stages of was six texts (3 composted direct typing and 3 dictated stories). The next step was the qualitative analysis.

Significance

The significance of this study is the expansion of the work on RBF towards higher education administrators. A gap in the research exists with this population, thus there is an opportunity for advancing this research. Higher education administrators make up a significant percentage of college and university support employees. One report shares that Black males make up 8% of senior level higher education administration, compared to about 5% of Black male college/university students. Retention and promotion of this population may be supported by understanding how RBF impacts their experiences in the profession. In understanding the relationship of RBF to Black male college administrators, interventions can be considered to mitigate this experience towards the goal of retention and promotion. Finally, future studies on this topic can allow key decision makers as well as higher education administration preparation graduate programs prepared to address this issues through additional research and training.

Delimitations and Limitations

The target population of this study is focused on Black men through an autoethnographic approach is not generalizable to other demographics that do not share my identities. The recollections of incidents shared throughout this study are from memory and therefore cannot be verified since many of these experiences caused a level of distress that can lead to difficulty of recall. Regarding limitations, this

autoethnography is constructed with my recollection of experiences throughout personal and professional life, thus subject to some inaccuracy. The results are of my narratives aim towards sense making of experiencing RBF.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF) has been widely explored in the literature since its introduction as a theory by William A. Smith in 2003. His work, along with others cited in this chapter, addresses the physical, psychological, and emotional impact of repeated exposure to overt and mundane racism in higher education institutions. This chapter aims to address concepts and theoretical frameworks, burnout, RBF, Invisible Tax, and race and mental health. Most of the current literature on RBF focuses on the student and faculty experience. I intend to demonstrate a need for a focus on higher education administrators (HEAs).

HEAs as an overall group number over 190,000 people in the United States according to U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics (2019). The population targeted in my work carry a variety of roles in supporting student success outside of the class room. This group is referred to as *Student Affairs*, *Student Services Personnel*, and *College Administrators* to name a few overarching roles. These roles include student group advisors, deans, academic advisors, multicultural affairs staff, residence hall staff, career advisors, student conduct administrators, and a large variety of other job functions. Of this population. I have chosen to use the term *higher education administrators* (HEA) to encompass the scope of this field. While some people who fall into this category will have a career as a specialist focused on one particular area of administration, it is common for these practitioners to have a more generalist career track. They either

embody a job role, which requires multiple or shared functions, or they will work in a variety of roles that span the occupation. Later chapters will focus on Black male HEAs. However, this literature review will be broader in its scope.

Job Burnout and Racial Battle Fatigue

Approaching this topic, it was useful to find distinctions and connections between Job Burnout and RBF. There is a substantial amount of research and literature in both areas, yet there are some characteristics that expand specificity on RBF from other forms of burnout. Job burnout is a result from prolonged exposure to stressors in the workplace. Malasch (2003) states burnout “involves the chronic strain that results from an incongruence, or misfit, between the worker and the job” (p. 189). Her argument that burnout has a stronger relationship to the situation rather than the individual experiencing burnout does not consider preexisting characteristics like personality types, generalized anxiety, and other predetermined factors in the individual. Updayaya et al. (2016) explain traditional focus on job burnout connected to work demand and resources that increase physical and psychological strain. In their research findings, high work engagement (demand) was associated with depressive symptoms which negated satisfaction in the workplace thus impacting burnout. Malasch’s work agrees, noting similarly, that exhaustion and a decrease in efficacy are characteristics of burnout. The impact of job burnout has more significant psychological and psychological impact as well.

According to Salvagion et al. (2017), burnout was a predictor of depressive symptoms and emotional exhaustion (p. 21). Malasch and Leiter (2016) included depressed immune symptoms, cardiovascular disease and pain, emotional exhaustion, and

depressive symptoms were associated with job burnout (p. 21). With this physical, emotional, and psychological outcomes, there are converging descriptors with RBF. One distinction in earlier work on burnout was the interpersonal impact impacting the syndrome. Malasch and Leiter continues to expand on this aspect of burnout. Their work expands the definition of job burnout to “a psychological syndrome emerging as a prolonged response to *chronic interpersonal stressors* on the job” (Malasch & Leiter, 2016, p.1). They listed contributing factors to include reward, community, fairness (including equity), and values (Malasch & Leiter, 2016, p. 3). Related to RBF, the when people are treated without “appropriate respect), their cynicism increase. This increase in cynicism has an impact on job burnout according to the research (Malasch & Leiter, 2016, p. 3). Golonka et al. (2018) agreed with much of the work above, adding findings showing “both individual characteristics and organizational factors that contribute to burnout” (p. 231).

Employees enter a myriad of roles bringing with them their own traumas, typologies, and experience. What is evident is that person-environment fit along with interpersonal stressors have an impact on their ability to thrive in the workplace, regardless of background. This is important regarding conversations related to race and burnout, particularly RBF. Racist acts, mundane or overt, are experienced by people prior to entering their job field. To reiterate, the key difference between job burnout and RBF is connected to the cumulative impact of microaggressions encountered over time.

Microaggressions

Developed in 1970, Pierce et al. (1978) referred to the term racial microaggressions as “subtle, stunning, often automatic, and nonverbal” behaviors or put

downs experienced by Black people (p.66). Solórzano et al. (2000) further described microaggressions as “subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously” (p. 60). It is these regular encounters with racist acts that show up in various forms whereby faculty, staff, and students of color (and other minoritized groups) are placed in situations where they need to make meaning of these encounters in consideration of how to respond. For example, a Black administrator being praised for speaking well may seem innocuous to the person providing the feedback, but the administrator would infer the presupposition underlying the compliment that other Black people are inarticulate. Another example could be a Black student being stopped on campus by campus police to check a student’s school ID. There are more subtle examples including Black campus community members being constantly mistaken for other Black colleagues/students/faculty and Black male students being asked what sports team they are part of by administrators and other students. Solórzano et al. conclude in their 2000 study that the “cumulative effects of racial microaggressions can be devastating” (p. 72). These regular interactions leave the targeted person in a difficult situation.

Sue et al. (2007) argue one of the first steps for people of color experience these slights is to “determine whether a microaggression has occurred” (p.279). This internal dialogue can lead to individuals questioning whether what they encountered was indeed a slight steeped in racism or if they are just overreacting. Stress and anxiety associated with this extra energy of sense making is a burden other privileged identities do not have to exert. If a confrontation ensues in reaction to a microaggression, consequences in expanding negative narratives is a risk to the victim. Denials and rebuttals to focus on

intent of the accused may leave the victim questioning the validity of their confronting of the issue. These experiences become prevalent for race-conscious people of color with a price that can be psychological and physical according to the literature on RBF.

Additional work on race and its impact on health have taken place in other contexts.

Race and Mental Health

When people are impacted by racism, and Black people in particular, then the research supports negative consequences of these interactions. In a study by Kwate and Goodman (2015), the impact of racism on mental and physical health showed findings that seemingly contradict some of the research on racism. Their longitudinal study focused on Black residents in New York City and they found racism's impact on mental health "were moderate but were still deleterious" (p. 715). It is important to note that the authors did find "increasing racism was associated with worsening mental health" (Kwate & Goodman, 2015, p. 717). One interesting finding related to those in their study who reported that they do not think about their race. While this group reported "fewer days of poor mental health, these individuals had more acute negative health effects than those who acknowledged thinking about their race with any degree of frequency" (Kwate & Goodman, 2015, p. 715). Even in the absence of what some would report as experiencing race or racism, this finding yielded disturbing results. In another study, (Metzger et al., 2018) focused on the drinking habit of adults experiencing racial discrimination. They "found that the association between racial discrimination and alcohol use and binge drinking was significant for individuals who reported experiencing greater levels of perceived stress in response to racial discrimination" (p. 493). One conclusion is that ignoring racism does not provide safety for those most vulnerable. Providing space to

address race and racism seems to be a critical matter. For those who report less racism, Kwate and Goodman's study demonstrates that this population had "more acute negative health effects than those who acknowledged thinking about their race with any degree of frequency" (Kwate & Goodman, 2015, p. 715). Detrimental behaviors, like problem drinking (Metzger et al., 2018) and mental health issues (Kwate & Goodman, 2015) note that racism broadly can have various negative effects on all who experience it, including those within higher education.

Inside Higher Education: RBF and Invisible Tax

In order to understand RBF, we can define it as resulting "from constant physiological, cultural, and emotional coping with racial microaggressions in less-than-ideal and racially hostile or unsupportive environments" (Husband, 2016, p. 95). An argument could be made that institutional structures and practices have an impact on this matter as well. Gorksi's (2019) study noted research participants attributed burnout to "(1) unbending commitments to racial justice, (2) institutional and interpersonal resistance, and (3) tensions and conflicts among campus activists" (p. 8). In addressing these issues, institutions and individuals need to be aware of what the research states. He argues both interpersonal and intrapersonal factors that impact RBF among justice focused higher education personnel. In higher education, RBF has been reflected in the literature to occur anywhere from the tenure promotion process to Black student experiences relating to their peers and administration.

There appear to be barriers to acknowledgment of race-based issues in the research. Harper (2012) states that "most higher education scholars rely on everything but racism in their attempts to explain, theorize, and discuss findings that emerge in their

race-related studies” (p. 23). Acknowledging racism and its systemic impact on behaviors, beliefs, and norms is an ambitious first step. Smith et al. (2011) highlight an institutional belief that “the main path to effective change is believed to be within an individual’s control” (p. 64). This paradigm absolves institutions of accepting any responsibility for their impact on individuals and is in line with the pull yourself up by your bootstraps belief. Extreme conclusions on whether this issue is within the individual responsibility to improve their circumstances or the responsibility of the community improvement matters leaves little room for debate or exploration the entire story. This study looks beyond the margins where both the individual and the community may have answers to address the issues that create RBF.

For institutions of higher education, it is important to have a body of research to inform key decision makers in addressing the many issues encountered by marginal populations in administrative roles. There are additional barriers, including racist perceptions members of this community at every level, including “resistance and retribution leveled by people and institutions” (Gorski, 2019, p.4). The finding of interpersonal issues within the justice community is particularly problematic. Gorski (2019) states that “infighting among activists as a leading cause of burnout” (p. 4). A cursory look at the average social media page demonstrates this dynamic. There seems to be the opportunity for some interesting future study related to infighting having a significant impact on burnout. Equally interesting is the “unbending commitment” noted in the above text. With the inability to escape inequities in every part of professional and personal experience, more information on individuals in practice addressing this aspect

seems to be the most within their control regarding how they deal with stressors (internal and external).

Students, faculty, and staff of color report experiences of racism in the colleges and universities. Looking outside of higher education unveils some interesting findings on the impact of racism on health. When focused on the experience of college and university students, faculty, and staff, multiple problems surface. The additional focus of time and other resources associated with dealing with racism is referred to as an *invisible tax*. Givens (2016) states “the invisible tax that Black students pay manifests through the mental, physical, and emotional resources that they could allocate to initiatives that promote academic and extracurricular success, but instead utilize to merely survive as students in a racially hostile campus environment” (p. 62). This shows up in several ways. Faculty and staff take on additional responsibilities of mentoring and assisting students (and each other) in navigating environments that are hostile to their racial identity (Givens, 2016, p. 64). Black students find it necessary to create and maintain support for their peers as important beyond the walls of higher education. This taxation also takes form in the psychological energy in the form of “‘anger,’ ‘anxiety,’ and ‘stress’” when dealing with racism on campuses. Givens states, “This is a tax that is both self-imposed for survival purposes, and imposed upon them by an institutional climate that neglects their needs as students in a variety of ways” (Givens, 2016, p. 62). This additional energy and time on top of responsibilities shared by all students, faculty, and staff creates an unbalanced experience that may connect to the mental and physical toll paid. There is a heightened level of responsibility felt by black students in creating

places of support, mentoring, and creating opportunities inclusive of their community's needs.

Among faculty and staff whose work is committed to justice, negative outcomes arise in the form of fatigue. Taking on issues of oppression is difficult work. The stakes are high for those doing the work as those most impacted by these issues. Gorski (2015) states "social justice activists face unique challenges, such as deep levels of emotional investment and the pressures of understanding the implications of injustice to marginalized communities" (p. 698). The level of emotional commitment can be hard to turn off or even down for many in this position. Based on the literature, issues of racism are not decreasing. Therefore, it is vitally important to understand these dynamics and how to address them through a full career. Stepping away from these difficult issues is not the answer. For "individuals for whom racial identity is central to self-concept experience less negative impact from discrimination on psychological distress" (Kwate & Goodman, 2015, p. 716). For the individual, this seems key. However, institutions need to take on measures to address and support all students, faculty, and staff.

A few areas worth exploring in the future will be what these measures look like, specifically for staff. Ideas like "counter-spaces" (Givens, 2016 p. 64) provide opportunities to work through these issues. While a useful tool for students, staff needing mentorship and support in dealing with race seems to have promise for providing safety to work through the many challenges of addressing such difficult issues professionally and personally. Addressing the "culture of selflessness" (Gorski, 2015, p. 701) that surrounds justice focused staff seems to be a challenge worth exploring further. The inability to pull away from the gravity of the work has some connection to this burnout.

Gorksi suggests that “activists begin to give themselves permission to seek balance between pouring themselves into their activism and tending to their well-being, not out of selfishness, but out of commitment to their movements” (Gorki, 2015, p. 707).

Current research on institutional racism and higher education seems to avoid naming racism as the problem. Harper (2012) challenges the current research stating “Instead of viewing racial differences as byproducts of institutionalized racism that requires systemic and organizational change, authors routinely suggested approaches that had little to do with investigating and responding to the realities of race on campus” (p. 18). There seems to be some veracity to ignore this aspect of the higher education experience. Additional research addressing racist experiences, practices, and policy warrant further production.

Black Misandry and RBF

A majority of the work focused on RBF is oriented toward Black faculty and students. This work focuses on Black male higher education administrators. This includes addressing how race intersects with gender. Misandry is the contempt or disdain of men. Black misandry refers to the intersection of the identity of race (Black) and sex (Male). Smith et al. (2007) define Black misandry as “an exaggerated pathological aversion toward Black men created and reinforced in societal, institutional, and individual ideologies, practices, and behaviors” (p. 559). In 2016, Smith et al. contextualized this conversation in higher education describing “racial battle fatigue as a theoretical framework for examining the stress response...associated with encountering Black racial misandric ideologies on historically White campuses” (p. 1190). In their work, they interviewed 36 Black male students on Historically White campuses and identified

increased surveillance and anti-Black male stereotyping. Two themes emerged from their study “(a) Black misandric stereotyping and marginality and (b) hypersurveillance and control” which manifested “as interactional-interpersonal problems, as subtle-overt racial insults, and as being seen as ‘out of place’ or ‘fitting the description’ of an illegitimate member of the campus community” (Smith et al., 2016, p. 1196). This experience is not limited to higher education settings, but their research was able to illustrate many examples of these lived experience amongst students. It should be noted that I have experienced similar experiences as a HEA at various stages in my career. Whether it be campus police phone calls made on me at a campus I’ve spent 10 years of my career, or colleagues unwarrantedly ‘interpreting’ for me to others after I speak, much of this literature rings true. Black males encounter experiences in which they must negotiate whether the act itself was racist and “how or if they should respond” to these experiences (Smith et al., 2016, p. 4). This thought process weighs heavy on the victims in navigating their own emotional and interpersonal wellbeing.

Referring to the tenure and promotion process of faculty, Witherspoon et al. (2016) describe negotiating these experiences in consideration of ‘nice’ behavior, stating “Niceness is problematic, and it creates a pratfall for those of color. The persistence of niceness as a discourse functions as a gendered and raced mental habit that remains firmly entrenched” (p. 905). In a rare article on RBF and HEAs, Husband (2016) describes the tight rope walk between authentically addressing these mundane experiences with the interpersonal dilemma they present with an awareness of “negative stereotypes and their perpetuation, through media and personal attitudes, continue to influence how Black Americans interact with others, and how others interact with them,

and how they see and feel about themselves” (p. 94). Regarding civility, Williams et al. (2019) discuss situations in which “people of color are expected to put their true feelings aside and prioritize their White counterparts’ feelings to be less threatening and deemed more respectful” as a form of emotional in order “to be deemed civil” (p. 7). If the stereotypes of aggressive, angry, dangerous Black male in the backdrop, navigating these difficult conversations carries significant consequences and an additional burden of mental work. Smith, Hung, and Franklin (2011) identify RBF demonstrating “that Black men experience mundane racial microaggressions that build up over time and are detrimental to their health and overall quality of life” (p. 77). Based on the earlier work cited above, the impact of racism on Black males in higher education has similar attributes.

Heuristics

A heuristic is a “mental shortcut that helps people problem solve and make judgments quickly and efficiently” (Arnold et al., 2016, p. 893). Heuristics and biases can override critical thought when it comes to important decision making. Heuristics are used without critique or accuracy checking in interactions, policies, hiring decisions, evaluations, and other behaviors relating to minoritized students, staff, and faculty in higher education. This likely contributes to a hostile environment for these populations. This inability to make critical decisions and override conscious or unconscious beliefs is problematic (West et al., 2008). Research on heuristics and bias demonstrates the need to “avoid reasoning that is too biased by prior opinion and prior belief” (West et al., 2008, p. 930). This includes Black faculty tenure and likely staff promotion decisions (Arnold et al., 2016). This challenge requires all members of higher education communities to

question their assumptions, beliefs, and ultimately decision to act on these behaviors as important to ensure biases are the major impact factor for vulnerable member of the higher education community.

What is equally disturbing is this behavior seen at the precollege level. Puchner and Markowitz's (2015) research with K-12 teachers and their attitudes regarding black families illustrates heuristics with the most vulnerable populations. Their research regarding attitudes and beliefs about African American families being "less involved than white families" is untrue, yet this underscores heuristic ideology with likely devastating results. In their work, they demonstrate the racial attitudes teachers associate with children and their families/parents without even making a connection. They state that "racism works via unconscious cultural narratives of which people are mostly unaware, even while those narratives have a major impact on their behavior within institutions" (p. 9). This idea is not unique. Plenty of popular videos and text have gained attention around the ideas of implicit bias. While implicit bias can have life and death consequences (e.g. police officer shooting black man based on threat perceptivity), the educational settings where race can be a factor on student experience does not garner the same attention, regardless of the devastating consequences. In the K-12 setting, Puchner and Markowitz (2015) share that "people follow established patterns of behavior based on accepted, unquestioned, background understandings of how the world works about what's true and not true about the world" (p. 10). An example of this is that "one of the best predictors of a child's achievement is teacher expectations for that student" (Puchner & Markowitz, 2015, p.13). With such low expectations of students based on race along with their family's value of their education, Black students are predicted to fare much

worse than their White counterparts. What is additionally disturbing about this is that these teachers believe their beliefs are based on evidence (Puchner & Markowitz, 2015, p.12). Similar to other research on heuristics, even if evidence is presented that counters this narrative, these teachers are likely to still operate with these biased perspectives. In higher education, this approach to critical thought by key decision makers contributes to burnout and RBF by college faculty and staff.

Summary

Job burnout is a syndrome experienced in any profession, including higher education. Closely connected to job burnout is RBF. While job burnout research and literature focused on high demands and poor fit of the individual to their job environment leading to their burnout, RBF focuses on the interpersonal mundane, overt and repetitive racial slights by other students, faculty, and staff. These experiences have wide coverage in the research relating to students and faculty, but little has been addressed regarding the experiences of HEA. Black male HEAs in particular have experiences of RBF, pay the invisible tax through their emotional labor and additional work of and creating stability racially challenging environments. The behaviors, policy, and decisions that create hostilities may be as direct as heuristic decision making, or as overt as racist acts. There are institutional beliefs around the idea of “fit” and “quality research” that impact hiring and promotion decisions. There are plenty of stories amongst people who are impacted by various aspects of institutional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal factors that impact their overall experience. The barriers to success and promotion are externally and internally experienced. The resulting issues of RBF need to be addressed. Higher education decision makers need to be exposed to the research on heuristics and RBF in order to

consider how their actions and decisions impact members of their institution. This calls for changing cultural and institutional beliefs and behaviors in order to move closer to true equity in that sector.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Introduction

As a Black male higher education administrator, I experienced much of what the literature describes as Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF) amongst faculty and students (Arnold et al., 2016; Smith, 2003, 2004; Smith et al., 2011). RBF is a theory introduced by Smith (2003), which describes a form of burnout experienced by faculty and students, whereby repeated microaggressions and overt acts of racism lead to physical, psychological, and emotional stressors and burnout. Little has been written regarding higher education administrators, yet I became curious about how this theory surfaces within this population. With a gap in literature focused on higher education administrators, I narrowed my study to focus on Black males. This led me to many questions regarding RBF, but for the purpose of this study, I decided to focus on the following questions:

- What are the stories that contributed to my experience with Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF) as a Black male higher education administrators?
- In what ways did I cope with my experience of RBF?

Identifying the methodological approach for this study led me to a search on previous research regarding RBF (Gorski, 2019; Husband, 2016; Smith, et al., 2011), as well as a range of work utilizing Critical Race Theory literature. This resulted in the choice of autoethnography as the methodology tool for analyzing this dissertation.

Autoethnography is both process and product of research in that it focuses on connecting personal experience to a broader cultural experience (Ellis, et al., 2011). This

process can take several forms, all leading to some form of storytelling following by self-analysis. My initial hesitation in utilizing this approach to explore RBF was based on avoiding working out personal experiences through the dissertation process. However, the autoethnographic approach informs the reader in ways that other research cannot. It is an approach that can humanize the problems addressed in this regard. After reading literature on the value of autoethnography and personal reflections of the impact of storytelling on learning, I affirmed this approach aligned well with the focus of my study. This chapter aims to address the topic of study in sharing the rationale for the study and methodological approach, the research design, my proposed data collection process, the analysis of data, the utility of the findings, and the limitations of this work.

Research Design and Rationale

My exploration into the literature uncovered many narratives and counterstories that connected to a way of learning that was culturally and personally valid. Part of my personal and professional healing was directly related to the stories of others. While searching through YouTube, I began to discover many successful people from various industries discuss their experiences of failure, struggle, and overcoming adversity that I found inspiring. The more I explored tens and now hundreds of hours of content online, I was exposed to stirring interviews and lectures of people who experienced a variety of low points discuss their journey through this difficulties to fore fulfilled, happy, and satisfying lives. The power of storytelling became a fixation that I started to connect with the narratives found in much of the literature I explored while returning to the doctoral studies. It is the value of this method of learning and sharing that I began exploring how I could utilize this approach as a form of academic writing.

Storytelling offers an ability to represent phenomena through illustrative and emotive narratives. Autoethnography allows me as an author to share stories that match with the current broader body of research, while also documenting “experiences that often go untold in everyday life” (Bolen, 2017, p. 74). It is through this experience, that I get the opportunity to reflexively explore these experiences to draw connections with broader cultural descriptions of RBF. Through an exploration of life events, this writing presents an analysis of these stories and how they connect or depart from current research. This approach can expand the research on RBF and contribute to the field (Bolen, 2017). To clarify this approach further, it would be worth exploring what distinguishes autoethnography from other forms of research.

Autoethnography is a qualitative research approach that matches the forms of autobiography and ethnography. Autobiography is the telling of one’s life story and personal accounts. It can be evocative in nature, with epiphanies and other learning that may be part in parcel with its production. Ethnography conversely is focused on cultural beliefs, values, and experiences leading to potential increased understanding of phenomena and other insights (Ellis et al., 2011; Starr, 2010). The researcher(s) in an ethnographic approach are outsiders to the culture being observed. Autoethnography is a combination of the two approaches. These stories are shared, analyzed, connected, compared, and distinguished from the broader cultural context of the writer. These two forms of writing broadly make up the autoethnographic approach, which “allows for critical self-reflection, exploration of a phenomenon from an insider’s perspective, and serves as a gateway for transformative learning” (Perry et al., 2019, p. 44).

There are distinct benefits to an autoethnographic approach. Autoethnography values the individual story (Muncey, 2005), allows for creativity (Custer, 2014), and retains a therapeutic value in providing space for the writer and reader to better understand self in the context of broader cultural narratives (Ellis et al., 2011). In the exercise of writing, analysis, and connecting to the broader cultural phenomena, the autoethnographic approach provides a specific approach to addressing research with the potential to share stories not previously explored in other forms of research. The location of the researcher is in focusing on self as study, thus placing the population of study as one (the researcher). With this description of the autoethnographic approach, finding a research design to answer the research questions has the potential to take many shapes.

Research Design and Data Collection

Autoethnography can take an analytic approach, which aligns closer to an ethnographic approach, whereas the evocative approach of autoethnography draws feelings, emotions, and connections with the stories shared (Dashper, 2016). Dashper notes the “stories can be powerful ways through which to discuss wider social issues and have the potential to enrich critical event studies by providing alternative and revealing accounts of event experiences” (p. 213). My chosen approach was to write an evocative autoethnography rich with details. This approach is challenging in its nature because it is not the simple retelling of events and stories. Rather, it requires deep reflection on details and emotions. Douglas and Carless (2013) describe this process of mining for these personal experiences by taking an approach of “systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall, ‘memory work,’ introspection, self-introspection, and interactive introspection, self-ethnography, diaries, free writing, and song writing” (p.98). Through

this evocative approach I identified accounts that matched up with the broader phenomenon of RBF, while engaging the reader in these experiences (Dashper, 2016). I identified experiences over my 17 professional years in addition to experiences prior to entering my career that had an impact on my experience with RBF. Table 1 demonstrates the beginning of my organization of these reflections in order to systematize my reflections. These stories provide an opportunity for “methodologically rich” work (Dashper, 2016, p. 218).

Table 1

Critical Events Examples Related to Racial Battle Fatigue Theory

Critical events	RBF Theory Characteristic/Principle
Childhood run-in with racial teen	Overt racist acts
WUPD Call for “car break in”	Microaggressions
Excessive Drinking/Drug Use	Psychological/Physiological risk
Needing interpreters at work	Microaggressions

Note. This table represents proposed events and the corresponding characteristics and principles related to the broader RBF theory.

Data Analysis

Autoethnography allows for “easy access to primary data source” since I am the source (Chang, 2008, p. 52). Built into this process of storytelling, the work itself becomes both product and analysis in nature (Perry et al., 2019). It is through the reflexive writing process that the stories are compared to and analyzed by the broader experience of RBF. I initiated my writing by recounting early encounters with racism, which formed my understanding of race from childhood, high school, college, and professionally as a Black male higher education administrator. The reason for including

my history is that I believe leaving out the context of previous experience with race leaves out an important part of the story. While RBF focuses on microaggressions, overt racist acts, and encounters with racism in higher education institutions, these interactions are experienced outside of higher education as well. It makes sense to tell the broader story, thus illustrating the societal and professional impact these encounters have with work burnout related to RBF.

For all six texts, a mixed grounded theory approach was utilized to analyze the text. With an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis framework, I began a process of coding to make meaning of the various narratives found in the writing. The first round of coding utilized a Grounded Theory approach looking for words, ideas, and concepts that were repeated to create codes. During this first round of coding, I created notes on patterns and ideas that stood out. In addition, I wrote notes through all 6 texts about the emotions I was feeling. This first round resulted in 30-40 codes per text. Next, I embarked in a second round of thematic coding, similar to the first process but with more in depth notes on patterns, my emotions going through the process, and potential emerging themes. After all six texts had a completed 2nd round of coding, created a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to capture all the codes in six separate documents. I made note of the codes that were repeated and grouped them according the similarities. Finally, the groups of codes were collapsed down to 15-20 codes before starting my 3rd round of coding. In the 3rd round, I utilized my collapsed codes from previous round to analyze the data. Again, notes were made to document new ideas, potential themes, and patterns to consider before identifying themes. Codes from this round were grouped into categories and finally collapsed into 5-7 themes in a spreadsheet. From the 5-7 themes, I embarked

on an indexing process. During the indexing process, I utilized the 5-7 themes identified in round three to match actual texts associated with the themes. In this process, I connected the words from the six texts to the themes and theory associated with this study (RBF). The entire process moved from consideration of the research questions, to focusing on details of the individual stories, and back out to the research questions through the entire process. Using the indexes created, I rewrote the stories in centered on the themes created from this entire process. This resulted in the final three groups of narratives composing chapters 4-6 of this dissertation.

Organization

The following chapters are presented in a series of stories separated by three distinct times in my life. The organization in the writing is a product of was formed through a number of steps. First, I wrote three distinct stories recalling various experiences ranging from my first recollection of racism to my experiences with Racial Battle Fatigue in my career as a higher education administrator. Each section of writing was reviewed multiple times to gain a clear understanding of what stories related most to my dissertation questions. Next, I utilized voice typing to tell a similar range of stories. This allowed for real time transcription in my natural voice. With this set of writing, I edited for clarity and accuracy of typing based on the limitations of the technology to finalize this second set of stories. At this stage, I borrowed from several coding approaches to meet the needs of the writing. This included an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis and Ground Theory approach.

Both sets of stories then went through a first pass of coding to identify words, ideas, and potential themes. With each writing set, I identified roughly 40 codes. A

second round of coding took place, allowing for more centralized set of codes to emerge. This allowed for collapsing the initial 40 codes down to 20 codes. A third round of coding took place where I utilized a spreadsheet to break down the 20 remaining codes into 5-7 codes per writing set utilizing some frequency counts in a spreadsheet. Finally, the 5-7 themes were then matched to the text in an indexing exercise. Through this process, I matched all appropriate text with the matching theme through a spreadsheet to identify matches to the research questions and larger Racial Battle Fatigue framework. This iterative process required moving back and forth from the larger story to specific areas of the text. Throughout the entire process, notes were taken as memos or comments. In particular, I paid attention to ideas, patterns, and any reactions I had (emotionally and otherwise) to the process. This process informed the following text in several ways. The stories documented in writing and transcription provided no sequential ordering. There were stories from before my career (1976-2002), stories during my career timeline (2002-2019), and stories directly related to my experience with Racial Battle Fatigue (2011-2013). Through the analysis process, these ranges of times seemed to make more sense in the presentation of these stories. While there are ideas that overlap in each of these date ranges, each section ideally connects in a way that makes sense of their presence. I've titled these sections: *Formation Experiences*, *Intra-Career Experiences*, and *RBF and Coping Experiences*. As the reader goes through each section, a narrative is shared followed by some initial connections to the research questions and broader theory of Racial Battle Fatigue.

Reliability and Validity

In autoethnographic work, reliability and validity will be subjective evaluation of the reader of my work. The reader engages with the text, then determines my credibility as a writer. Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) place the reliability as an essential part of the writing in that the writing itself needs to seek accuracy. This is difficult to predict considering that not all readers will have similar experiences to ones I have encountered throughout my life and career. For those who do, validity and reliability will be easier to establish. For those whose exposure to these stories will be a new experience, it will be my responsibility as a writer to draw a coherent picture, whereby the reader can make the realistic leap of faith that what I am sharing may be true. Backing this up with the research and other narratives will provide me with the greatest chance to make a stronger connection for this group of readers in that to demonstrate these types of experiences being experienced by others. In addition to the readers' experience, the nature of autoethnography has the potential for allowing me as the writer to develop new understandings of my experiences. In being able to demonstrate any changes or growth in my understanding of my experiences related to the larger context of RBF research, I will be able to exhibit validity of my choice of methodology using autoethnography. This will be better established with details in my writing, connection to the literature, and demonstration of learning new conclusions drawn through the process. The more credibility in detail and research I can establish, the more reliability can be established. There are some challenges in the autoethnographic approach towards generalizability and its limitations.

Generalizability

One of the goals of autoethnography is to inform the reader. This information is to be used by the reader as they see fit. According to Ellis and Bochner (2011), generalizability is connected to the readers' experience. Like validity, the reader makes a comparison to their personal experiences along with those of others they may know.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. First, autoethnography by nature has a small sample size in that the writer is the focus of the study. This limits generalizability as compared to other forms of research. Second, recollections throughout the study will be centralized in my recollection of a variety of experiences ranging from 1980 to 2019. Memory is not perfect, thus subject to questioning its accuracy (Ellis & Bochner, 2011). To control for this, as much attention to details in recall and external conversations will provide some limited accuracy checking. Additionally, those who were around during these earlier experiences may not be around anymore or have any recall of these experiences.

Summary

Racial Battle Fatigue is a form of burnout widely explored by faculty and students of color in higher education settings. This study aims to explore this theory in relation to Black male higher education administrators. My motivation to explore RBF in this context is connected to my personal story. This led me to Autoethnography as a choice of methodology. Autoethnography is both the final completed product of this dissertation, along with the methodological process in which it is constructed. Identifying a series of

narratives from 1980 to 2019, I engaged in a reflexive writing process with a detailed analysis of the stories connecting them to the broader culture experience of RBF. The evocative approach to this writing presents an opportunity for the reader to connect directly with the topic or find new learning opportunities through its detailed accounts of varying experiences. I drew connections to current literature, identify new findings not available widely, and conclude with recommendations for future practice by not only the impacted population of Black male higher education administrators, but anyone who works with this population.

CHAPTER 4

FORMATION EXPERIENCES

Introduction

My experience with Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF) was built on a life history of racism tracing back to a very young age. With that as the backdrop, it felt sensible to consider my recollection of these experience and their contribution to the cumulative impact of race and racism in my life. In addition, there are other details that appear meaningful. This included early traumas experienced along with personal challenges. It felt disingenuous to only recount stories related to the work environment with these experiences being the backdrop of my life. This first section recounts my family history from our migration to the United States, increased racial encounters in junior high school, continued slights in high school, and racial incidents in as a college student. All of these experiences occurred prior to my professional career, but there are through lines that connect these experiences to those career moments that impacted my experience with RBF.

Family Life and Trauma

Understanding my experience with Racial Battle Fatigues requires some context of my life until that point. I am the middle child of 5 to a single, divorced mother. My mother gave birth to my oldest sister in the late 1960s as a single mom at age 18 in Uganda, Africa. Years later, she met my father, a charismatic religious man 5 years her elder. After a lengthy pursuit, she chose to be with him despite her father's misgivings. After they wed, they had my older brother in May of 1974 followed by my twin and me

in June of 1975. With the help of Christian missionaries, my parents were able to move our family to the United States in 1976. In March of 1977, the youngest of my mother's 5 children was born, my sister. By 1982, their marriage dissolved due to behaviors of my father (most of which I will not share in detail due to others involved). This was the first family personal crisis I had experienced which I would refer to as trauma. I remember that night vividly, even though I was about 7 years old.

I recall a series of fights between my parents. These were verbal altercations where loud yelling was audible to my siblings and me. One night, their argument was particularly worse. With yelling back and forth, mostly inaudible, I heard my mother storm out of the house. Minutes later, my father came to my brothers' and my room telling us to get up. He gathered up my youngest sister as well, but my older sister was nowhere to be seen. I noticed that he had my mother's purse in his hands, which was somewhat startling. In the chill of the southern California night, he ushered us quickly into the car without saying much. After some driving, we arrived at a late night diner where we piled out of the car and into a seating booth. What I recall was my father allowing us to order whatever we wanted. I ordered an onion loaf, an item I had never heard of before in my life. Along with our food came this large collection of onion rings. I remember my dad smiling at the size of the food item as I attempted to eat as much of it as my 6 year old body could handle. Once we all ate to our fill, we piled back into the car and headed home. What I saw was quite serious, even to my 6 year old mind.

Police vehicles with lights flashing were in front of our family home. As we entered into the house, two police officers confirmed it was my father. My siblings and I were told to go to our rooms while they carried on their conversation. I can't recall the

content of their conversation, but what seemed like hours later my mother came to each of our rooms to gather us up with a few personal effects. Once again, we were driving off in our family car. However, this time it was a visibly shaking mother who guided us to our next destination. That would be the last time we spent together as an intact family.

Our family endured what seemed like a lengthy divorce process ending with my mother receiving full custody of all her children. Prior to this judgment, the four youngest children attended several supervised visits at an office building with my father. After several office visits, we were taken to our old family home with a supervisor selected by the courts. My mother was absent during all of these visits. I remember being terrified of my father when I spilled milk on the counter. His reaction surprised me when he just smiled and said that it was okay while wiping up the milk. For a moment, I had hope that we would get to see him more often. This quickly changed. Within two years, we effectively had no contact with my father due to his inconsistency of attending supervised visitation. I remember visits being moved back to the office building, waiting in the car to see if the visit would take place, and being sad that he did not show up again. The judge awarded my mother sole custody, thus she began her life as a single parent. Soon after, my father stopped paying child support, plunging my family into deep poverty. The years that followed found our family moving multiple times (a behavior I repeated in adulthood) through several school districts in order to find housing my mother could afford. As a single mother of five children, our first independent move was to a low income apartment complex in Garden Grove, CA in 1983. The neighbor consisted mostly of Black, Latino and Asian families from Southern California. While there were the usual issues related to poverty in this complex, it was the time of breakdancing, an

activity where groups of young people would form “crews” to learn a set of complex dance routines to compete against other crews. This activity was a welcome reprieve from the violence and stress I experienced in my own home. Although there were plenty of unattended hours spent each day in the neighborhood with other children our age, it was a safe time where Latino and Black children could form crews to dance rather than be lured into the violent gang culture. Unfortunately, our apartment conditions were beyond repair despite the efforts my mother made to keep a clean house. After a series of cockroach infestations, we moved to another location by the grace of a generous apartment owner.

My mother shared years later how this man met my mother and agreed to rent a three bedroom apartment to her immediately. When my mother disclosed that she had 5 kids, including a teenage daughter who was pregnant, the man still found the generosity to give her a chance. I saw this generosity later occur when church groups would drop off food and Christmas gifts for my siblings and me. Additionally, when the apartment we lived in subsequently sold to a new owner, he employed my brothers and me to carry out varying odd jobs including yard work, window washing, and exterior painting. The new landlord, Bob, was married to a woman named Debbie. Debbie and Bob played the role of surrogate grandparents to my siblings and me. While my oldest sister eventually married and moved out of the state, Bob and Debbie taught us various trades to keep my brother's and me busy after school and in the summer. We started to learn the value of hard work and raising money. This quickly expanded to my twin brother and me going door to door first in the surrounding apartments and eventually venturing to the houses of middle class families offering to do odd jobs for money. Nobody told us to do this, but it

seemed like an easy way to earn money for the things my mother could not afford.

Around this time, my mother took a second job as janitorial staff for our former church preschool. She would bring my siblings in rotation to help her on the job. While we didn't get paid for this work, we knew it was important to assist our mother in this work because it allowed for her to feed, clothe, and shelter us. These lessons of valuing hard work gained from my surrogate family and my mother's efforts were invaluable. I was about 11 or 12 years old at this point, but I started to internalize the importance of work, generosity, and expanded my definition what constituted a family member (e.g. Bob and Debbie).

Eventually, my twin signed up for a paper route where he delivered the Orange County Register to homes in the neighborhood. I quickly followed suit continuing to learn the value of work for pay. When the newspaper decided to change to early-morning routes only carried out by adults, my mother picked up a second job delivering paper replacing her janitorial job. My brothers and I were in junior high school at this time (7th and 8th grade), so she started to rotate us into helping her deliver early morning papers from that age through junior year of high school on Saturday and Sunday mornings. I watched my mother operate on 5 hours of sleep every night to cover the costs of raising 4 children at this point. The positive lesson learned from her hard work built on a growing value of contribution for most of my siblings and me. However, the void of my father not being around was a deeply painful experience that I struggled to make sense of most of my life. The traumatic loss of that relationship began to add on to the rest of the issues we encountered related to poverty. I remember this being fundamental to my goals of fatherhood.

When it came time to being a father of my own son in 1999, I began to question these early experiences of a mother forced to work to support family despite having an absent father. Despite this deficit in my life, the poverty we endured, and the trauma experienced in living in low income to mixed-income areas, I was able to make choices which inevitably led to being the first in my family to attend a university. Although my university experience was not perfect, I made decisions that continued my academic and professional advancement for many years to come.

The early lessons of hard work were critical during these moments. I recalled my mother's efforts to work multiple jobs to keep her family fed while sending money back to Uganda to build a school for children in the village she was raised in. I reflected in my darkest times how she was able to find the drive to complete these seemingly impossible responsibilities while never leaning on vices of drugs and alcohol. She seemed to lean on her faith in God and hard work. The observations were critical to my development. Although there are many positive lessons learned here putting hard work, I had a hard time making sense of why my mother had to work so hard. What I found out many years later was that she was sending money back to Uganda to help fund building of a school and how to build a house for many of my orphaned cousins who were the victims of the HIV and AIDS virus when they lost their parents. What never made sense to me was the lack of my father's presence in my life. He never paid a dollar of child support. My mother was left to raise five kids on our own and a partially support my sister's early years of raising her mom's first granddaughter. She was 36 years old but became a grandmother but she work extra hard to make sure that everybody was taken care of. I continued to thrive academically and socially throughout this period of my life. However,

there were forces outside of my family's circumstances that would begin to add on to the trauma related to Black Surveillance and race.

Junior High School and Early Surveillance

The concept of Black Surveillance has been covered widely in various areas of American life which will be discussed in the discussion section of this chapter. This includes higher education. The unfortunate part is this form of surveillance takes place well for Black male HESA professionals well before they enter their careers. Forms of surveillance in my life can be traced back to junior high school in southern California. At the age of 12, I recall my earliest awareness of where my identity intersections of youth and race were the cause of unwanted attention in various areas.

Garden Grove is a city in Orange County in southern California. The population when I entered intermediate school (7th-8th Grades) was around 140,000 residents with about 1.5% being Black or African American in 1987. This was the age where my group of friends and I started to walk .8 of a mile to Donald S. Jordan Intermediate School. Any given day over those two academic years of walking this distance from my family's 3 bedroom apartment to school were filled with various forms of exposure to interactions related to race. About .3 of a mile from our apartment was an *am/pm* convenience store that still exists in the same location. This convenience store was equipped with a gas station, magazines, food items, and other amenities found in similar businesses.

Part of our usual walk to school involved stopping by the local *am/pm Mini Mart* to purchase snacks and peruse magazines before continuing the rest of the distance to school. The group of friends I walked to school with were mostly Asian-American,

Latino, Black, and one White adolescent. Within a few weeks of walking to school, a disturbing pattern began to emerge. The clerk at the convenience store began to ask us not to look at the magazines. Their tone in demanding that we buy the magazine, purchase food, or leave became more aggressive as the weeks went by. No matter how much we protested their behavior, it was clear that they were not interested in us being in the store. As a 12 year old, this was a really confusing experience. With such a diverse community, I could not understand the badgering by these store clerks. As the year's progressed, a new awareness beyond the store clerks sealed my understanding of youth and race.

Our group of friends had grown to about ten or so 13 and 14 years olds from various ethnic and racial backgrounds. I began to hear stories from my friends of police harassment. Up until this point in my life, I had not experienced any interactions with police officers for any reason. I was beginning my athletic involvement in football, and there was very little time for occupying spaces where heavy police presence was required. Then one afternoon after school this group and I began our late afternoon .8 of a mile walk home after practice. About half way through the walk, a police officer on a motorcycle pulled up to this group of boys and me. I immediately recalled the stories of police harassment and became internally defensive. After asking us several questions about where we were going and what we were up to, checking our school IDs, and other questions of which I cannot recall, the officer eventually let us go without any further incident. A slow simmer of rage and resentment began to build inside of me.

The years following of completing junior high and high school continued to be filled with hypersurveillance of store staff in shopping malls, convenient store clerks, and

police detainment with no criminal outcomes. The simmer of resentment towards authority grew even further, although I could not articulate to adults around me (including my mother) on what I was experiencing. I decided to leave the state of California to attend school at the University of Iowa in 1993 where these interactions with police stopped. While I endured many other microaggressions in the form of campus newspaper cartoons, articles, and peer interactions, my police interactions dropped to almost zero. I began to believe that these types of interactions may have disappeared from my life's experience as merely a bad time of my life.

When I entered the middle school there was a new thing that we had to do as a group. There was a walk that we had to make every day from our house to our Junior High School. California Junior High School consists of 7th and 8th grade. My brother and I now were in the same grade. We were walking to when there was pretty was something experiencing for the first time. There were two stops we'd like to make: there was a donut shop and there was an *ampm Mini Mart* that was at the corner of Trask and Brookhurst which is really close to where we lived. We would walk to the shop to get a donut and then occasionally, then we would go to the *ampm*. Sometimes we would look at the magazine and buy snacks. On the way to school, I started noticing this interesting pattern of treatment from the employees at the mini mart. The clerks at the store seemed to be watching us very closely whenever we entered the store. At first I thought this was strange behavior. After some weeks, I noticed they did not treat other customers in the same way. I concluded that they were watching us closely because we were young and Black. The crew that we walked to school with was diverse with most of them being Latino, Asian American, or Black. We would walk to these the *ampm* and after about a

month or two into the school year start asking us if we were going to buy them anything. When we read the magazines, they demanded that we pay or leave. This kind of harassment started to happen over and over. The clerks were people of color, Southeast Asia immigrants and it was confusing. I was really frustrating and it was something that I tried to come to terms with but I never really got comfortable with it. Throughout these experiences, I was able to stay focused on my academics. With school, sports, and a healthy social life, I was on track to graduate from high school successfully.

Repetitive Events in High School

By the time I reached high school, I never thought about going to college. Spending kindergarten through the beginning of the eleventh grade in the schools I attended meant never being engaged with the prospects of going to college directly. There were a couple people I knew from my high school who local legends for going to a university to play sports. I accepted somewhat early in my high school career that playing college sports would not be my path. I decided to focus on other things, including my first high school girlfriend. This relationship ended abruptly in the middle of my junior year. Emotionally devastated by this turn of events, I was confused on how to navigate such heartache. Coincidentally, a friend of mine who was attending a private school with a promising wrestling program asked me if I wanted to join him to play sports. He made a very appealing sell, sharing that I would not have to pay tuition since his parents had decided to add me on as one of their children. After gaining permission from my mother, I decided to transfer to Calvary Chapel High School to finish on my high school career.

Calvary Chapel was a relatively new high school in 1992. In its third year of existence, it was an add-on to an already existing Christian religious elementary and

junior high program on the same site. Consequently, the school was about 1/4 the size of my large public high school. The Monday following my breakup, my friend's mom drove me to my soon to be former high school to sign out of all of my classes and initiate the transfer process. The next day, I found myself in the office of the guidance counselor as she worked with me to create my new class schedule. This was an exciting and nerve wracking time, having only one friend in the entire new school. However, I soon realized that this was one of the best decisions I made. In my meeting with the guidance counselor, she asked me a series questions I never heard before, "What do you want to do after high school? Do you want to go to college? What do you want to do?" In retrospect, I often questioned why public schools never engaged me about my post-high school plans. However, in the moment I responded with a "yes." She looked over my transcripts from my previous school and confirmed I was on track with all my required coursework. She put together a schedule of classes to confirm that I would be eligible for the minimal requirements to attend a four year institution. I was confused, curious, and in disbelief about that interaction. I cautiously started to believe I could go to college. Over the next year and a half, that caution subsided. With such a positive start to this stage of my high school experience, there were other dynamics that troubled me throughout my time at this school.

Going to this young private school in Orange County, California made me one of the few people of color in attendance. Unfortunately, I encountered several racist acts during this time. The first was on the football team. I was the only black player on our team my senior year, however we had other people of color. Regardless, the team was predominately White. I was pleasantly surprised that one of the pass times of trash talk

amongst friends and teammates. I knew this to be a typical behavior of males at any age. We would make fun of each other for just about anything: a girlfriend, clothes we wore, lack of athletic talent—most everything was in bounds. One day after practice, a group of teammates and I were sitting around after practice doing some trash talk where I said something particularly funny about one of our teammates. As the group laughed heartily, he retorted “Hey, at least I’m not Black.” I didn’t understand his choice of trash talk, since being Black was a good thing to me. I replied, “You didn’t get me. That doesn’t make sense.” Another teammate chimed in, “No, he got you.” I sat there confused. Did these guys really think being Black was a bad thing? We left the conversation and headed back to the locker room with me feeling quite confused and unsettled. The level of this new perspective on my race continued to increase in future interactions.

The second incident happened when I was competing with several people to be the keynote speaker at our graduation. One of the competitors was our class valedictorian. He already was going to be doing a speech for our graduation, so I was surprised to see him competing for this honor as well. After we all did our speeches, we were told that we would find out the results in the coming days. Within a couple of days, I was notified by a faculty member that I won the spot to speak. Later that afternoon, I ran into the valedictorian who shared in our conversation that the decision was made to choose me “probably” because I was Black. I was hurt about the overt racial nature of the statement. However, what really pained me was how internally I started to question whether or not I was good enough for this speaker honor. I felt a range of emotions from embarrassment to anger. Instead of challenging him on his assertion, I just moved past

the conversation left with this mix of emotions. This would not be our last racial encounter.

My last incident encountering racism related to my time in high school occurred during an event called Grad Night. Schools from the southern region of California would go to Disneyland where the park would be reserved for their graduating seniors. This was an opportunity for us to hang out celebrate our graduation with our peers before we embarked on our various next steps in life. Students from my high school boarded several school buses full of energy and excitement towards this annual tradition. It was our turn, and I eagerly anticipated celebrating with friends while interacting with new people from all of over our part of the state. We pulled into the parking lot with a sea of other yellow school buses. The energy in the bus I was on began to increase. We waved and chatted with students on buses next to us. All of us were strangers, yet there was a shared joy for the evening to come. As our bus edged our way towards the drop-off point, we moved parallel to another bus that was mostly Black graduating seniors. I was aware that I was the only black student graduating from my private school, so the differences in demographics between my bus and the bus across the way caught my attention. As we slowed down, students from this particular bus excitedly started talking back and forth with students from my school. The exchanges were filled with plenty of positive energy enthusiasm. Soon, the buses started moving again and we parted ways. A moment later one of the members of my yelled to me from the other side of the bus, “Hey Josh, why don't you translate for us.” Some students on my bus laughed a bit at this comment, but I sat there silently. My stomach had a dull aching feeling and my face felt flush. My feelings were hurt. They were hurt not only about the embarrassment and otherness I felt

on the last night together with my graduating class, but also the fact that he was making a comment about the people in the other bus as if their English was not good enough in understandable. I was so frustrated and helpless at that moment. Frustrated at his comment. Frustrated with those who chose to laugh. Frustrated that nobody stood up for me to this insensitive comment. Frustrated that I did not stand up for myself in that moment. I felt a lack of agency in this inability to challenge him in that moment. I was hurt, angry, and defeated. Once again I found myself having to push those feelings down.

The College Experience

In the fall of 1993, I boarded a plane for the first time since arriving in the United States when I was 1 years old. This time, I was an 18 year old incoming student at the University of Iowa. I found myself experiencing a familiar range of feelings and emotions as I embarked on this new journey. I was full of fear and excitement simultaneously in the anticipation of the new experiences I would encounter as I started my college career. This is where I began my love for the college experience. Over the years, I realized that my decision to go to college would change me in very positive ways. My time at the university also introduced me to a familiar set of experiences related to race. Of the many experiences I encountered during this time, three particularly stand out in my memory.

In 1993, the internet had not been widely accessible on college campuses. Part of that meant registering for classes and processing financial aid had to be done in person. This included waiting in long lines to receive services for whatever transition needs came up. One afternoon, I waited in line at the financial aid office to process some required documentation. When it was finally my time to talk to the attendant at the office, they

asked me a series of questions. The person working the counter that afternoon looked at me, then asked “Are you an athlete?” I found the question odd considering the previous two people in front of me in line were not asked the same question. I quickly replied no, and we continued processing the paperwork. As I left that encounter, I immediately wondered if the question came from my build (a former high school athlete) or my race as a Black young man. I decidedly concluded the assumption was made based on my race. What came along with that was wondering if the perception of others in the campus community would draw the conclusion that I was there based on an athletic scholarship versus my academic ability. I was left with a feeling of insecurity and dread of this being a continued experience. While this type of question came up several times more in my early years, there were very few places for me to process what this experience was like. I continued to endure other slights in various forms.

The next group of incidents happened through the campus newspaper. The first was a newspaper cartoon depicting a Black man being hung related to some political matter of the day. This resulted in a protest demanding the Dean denounce this act in light of student tuition dollars going to fund the newspaper. The second situation involved an article on the front page of the newspaper exclaiming the Black students were graduating from the university at lower rates compared to their White counterparts. This ostensible reporting seemed to push the narrative of Black inferiority for me and others. While the second incident did not insight protests, there was a personal toll taken by me regarding how I worked hard to make sense of the data and how it related to me and my race. These messages spoke to me about the value of Blackness in how the

campus newspaper decided to depict my race. In the classroom, my early experiences of discussions of race were not much more promising.

All first-year students at the university were required to take a class called rhetoric. In this class, we engaged in writing and speech assignments to learn out to speak and write persuasively. During my second semester of this course, I participated in listening to my classmates speak a range of ideas connected to things that interested them. One afternoon, a White male from Iowa shared his speech connected to his feelings on race and affirmative action. As soon as I heard the subject matter, my heart began to palpitate. I had no idea what to expect from him, but I felt that it would not be enjoyable for me.

This student began to tell the story about how he is from a small town in Iowa with very few Black people, yet one of the Black students in his town was able to get into many schools that he did not. He asserted that this was some form of unfairness and that people should only get into college based on merit. He believed he was slighted from admission to many of the same schools his peer did due to him being White. As he moved through his speech, my heart rate began to increase dramatically. I desperately peered around the room to see if anyone else was reacting negatively to the words he was sharing, but found myself in familiar territory of feeling alone. As with all speeches, the instructor allowed the class to respond or ask follow up questions. I waited a few seconds to see if anyone had anything to add. The room fell silent. Finally I raised my hand as all of my classmates looked at me.

I tried to control my breathing, but they felt shallow and rushed. My head began to feel warmer as I tried to get the words out of my mouth. With my heart beating as if I

had run a 4 minute mile, I began to speak. With my voice slightly shaking, I gave what seemed to be a five minute response. I challenged his assertion on race being a factor. I explained to him that nobody showed up to my house offering me a scholarship or admission their college or university. I explained to him the hours and days spent at the local library in my hometown searching through books of scholarship and encountering scholarship for women, people raised on farms, engineers, and so many other groups. I concluded with something to the effect of if he did not get into those colleges, maybe it was more about him not being admissible and little to do with the race of someone else who did. When I finished, the class fell back silent. The instructor quickly wrapped up that section and ended class on time.

As I exited the building, my energy was drained from my body. That short exchange took so much from me. I was about 10 yards from the building when I heard someone call my name. It was a different student, a White male who ran up to join my side. He looked at me and said, “Hey man, I just want to tell you I liked the way you handled that situation.” He continued to share that he appreciated my calm demeanor in challenging our classmate’s speech. He acknowledged how difficult that must have been for me, but he wanted to express he admiration at my braveness and calm. Although his perception of my feelings was inaccurate, his words meant to the world to me in that moment. A sense of relief washed over me and my body began to quickly settle.

Discussion

Impact of Early Trauma

Chapter 4 focuses on narratives from my life prior to my career. In considering stories I wanted to explore related to the research questions, it felt necessary to consider my life prior to my career. For this section, I chose to start with my family background and some of the events connected to the challenges of transition, poverty, and divorce. Through the qualitative analysis of these stories, themes of youth, family, negative emotions, and race showed up early in my life. In addition to these themes, policing showed up in the form of intervention for my parents' last day of marriage together. In writing and telling (audibly) these stories, the urge to dig deeper into them made more sense as they are the foundation of my professional experiences. These experiences transition to moments of witnessing my other's resilience and the generosity of others towards our family. There seems to be something about those stories that demonstrate a balance of trauma, resilience, and the generosity of others. These seem to be themes that carry through all of the narratives shared in this research. There are couple of things to note from the early narratives prior to my junior high school years. One is that both of my parents experienced the collective trauma of colonization of British rule in their upbringing in Uganda. These trauma likely had an impact on the decisions they made and the people they became as adults. These decisions impacted many parts of their lives, including their parenting and marriage. Kiser and Black (2005) explain that "Trauma begins with a stressor(s) defined as an event or situation that upsets the organism's (individual or family) equilibrium, requiring a righting response" (p. 727). In consideration of these early traumas of my parents, this does not account for previous conditions the endured in a country with a shifting government coming off a history of British rule ending in 1972. With the arrival of Christian missionaries came the come

devaluing of their culture. For example, ethnic Ugandans were often asked the “what is your Christian name?” whenever they introduced themselves with their birth names. For example, if introducing myself to a missionary, I would say in English (the national language of Uganda) “My name is *Amote*.” The typical response would be “No, not your pagan name. What is your Christian name?” With destabilization of government, and remnants of British and Christian influence, my parents made their way to America looking for opportunity as many immigrants do.

My parents’ divorce led to years of poverty and additional communal traumatic experiences. In addition to the experiences of violence, lack of safety, and abuse, surveillance began to surface as another direct traumatic experience I endured. As noted in later chapters, these early experiences seem related. Nuriusa et al (2015) argue “early stressors exert prolonged influence into later years through stress proliferation” (p. 149). In laying a foundation for later issues, Nuriusa et al go on to say “those with the highest levels of childhood trauma who also encounter greater adult adversities are most vulnerable to suffering mental health problems” (p. 149). Part of the form of burnout explained in detail in future chapters focuses on depression symptoms and behavior choices. In my professional experience in the nonprofit and higher education settings, I’ve encountered numerous students at a range of ages who’ve endured various forms of trauma in need of therapeutic support and professional administrative care. The scope of this paper is not focused on support for students’ experiences, but it should be noted that many people are transitioning to professional spaces with a range of past experiences like the ones I’ve shared in the narratives above.

Youth Encounters with Racism

While my first remembered racist encounter happened at the age of six, I did not make meaning of these types of issues until years later. Patcher et al. (2010) defines racism as “negative beliefs, attitudes, actions, or behaviors that are based on phenotypic characteristics or ethnic affiliations. It assumes an inherent superiority or inferiority on the basis of perceived group attributes” (p. 62). By the time I entered junior high school, I understood the concept of race and racism. From watching a playground fight where my brother was called “nigger” to media portrayals of Black people (and other people of color), it was clear to me that race mattered. There seemed to be an order of value that impacted treatment of people within my diverse community depending on your racial and sometimes ethnic background. This awareness can best be described as centrality. Burrow and Ong (2010) describe centrality as “the extent to which race is a principle component of one’s identity” (p. 385). Once previously simple experiences of visiting convenience stores and shopping malls garnered unwanted scrutiny for store clerks and security, my thinking about how race played a role in my existence within my community increased tremendously. Burrow and Ong go on to delineate two aspects of meaning making of racial identity with the concepts of *private regard* and *public regard* (2010, p. 385). Private regard describes “the value that one ascribes to belonging to their racial group” whereas public regard explains “perceptions of how members of their group are typically viewed by others” (p. 385). My private regard for my race was not quite formalized at this stage of life, but I was acutely aware that my race brought unease, scrutiny, and hypersurveillance to the forefront.

Hypersurveillance

There were varying forms of hypersurveillance for me during these pre-career times, starting in my youth. There were the mall security guards, watchful store clerks, and police encounters. The emotional, psychological, and physiological impact of these encounters ranged from anger, to stress, to sadness and other responses. With already existing family trauma (e.g. parents' divorce, father abandonment, poverty), the outside world did not seem any kinder. While there were many positive relationships being formed with friends and family throughout this difficult time, the treatment from strangers began to take a different tone in the form of hypersurveillance. I did not take long to make the connection to this type of unwanted attention and my race.

The above story illustrates hypersurveillance starting in the 7th grade. While the research indicates levels of surveillance earlier in their life experience historically and in modern times (Berry, 2015; Remster & Kramer, 2018; Rios, 2009; Sewell et al, 2016), my first encounters in convenience stores and walking from home were a troubling development. Making meaning of these encounters as a 12 year old, I did not have access to the broader phenomena. Gray (1995) refers to the history of Black men and surveillance, stating "Because of this perception of threat, many Black men were often placed "under surveillance," their behavior closely monitored. This could mean being watched by others when walking in the street or being asked to show their identification" (p 62). With the onslaught of these experiences, I first questioned what was wrong with the people (clerks, police officers) treating me this way. Eventually, this moved towards an internal dialogue about what was wrong with me. The impact of these regular interactions captured by Sewell et al. (2016) stating "Black males, as a result of hypersurveillance and discrimination, suffer social, physical, and mental health challenges.

Chronic environmental stressors have detrimental effects on the individual, family, and community” (pp. 287-288).

This next sentence is difficult to write. As I moved forward through my high school career, I remember a distinct frustration that evolved into fleeting thoughts of wishing I wasn't Black. Maybe if I was not born into my Black body, I would not have to deal with the amount of unwanted attention and discrimination that started to accumulate. This is reflected by Oeur (2016) positing “These forms of surveillance have had important repercussions for how youth maintain self-worth” (p. 1). My community decidedly excused its treatment of me and others who look like me. Rios (2011) best explains this treatments in sharing, “Being labeled a criminal risk affected the adolescents' life because it seemed to give society an excuse to treat them as if they were dangerous and in need of constant surveillance.” (p. 773). This all was the foundation of experience leading towards my transition to adulthood.

Higher Education and New Forms of Microaggressions

Within the first weeks of my experience as an undergraduate student, these racial slights picked up. The perpetrators were not police, but rather other students and college administrators. The bulk of literature on RBF focuses on faculty and student experiences, and my experience at this stage does not stray far. Morales (2015) noted “For Black men to be stereotyped as athletes imply they were accepted to PSU for their athletic prowess rather than their intelligence, negating their academic merit.” (pp. 55-56). My encounter at the financial aid office began a series of interactions with people assuming I was an athlete instead of a generally matriculated student. The speech I listened to regarding

college admission and race from my White peer, newspaper headlines, and other slights continued to build upon the foundation of racism in my life.

Conclusion

As to the research question, “What are the stories that contributed to my experience with Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF) as a Black male higher education administrators?” the above text demonstrates that these racist encounters happened very early in my life and continued on through my college preparation. The national experience of Uganda, my parents early divorce, poverty, hypersurveillance, and microaggressions formed a pattern of treatment that continued into my career. I argue that life is one indivisible whole. One cannot point to specific experiences in my career without acknowledging these experiences prior to that time. Later chapters will illustrate stories that continue to develop themes connected to the overall study.

CHAPTER 5

CAREER EXPERIENCES

Introduction

After completing my undergraduate and graduate degrees, I embarked on my professional career in student affairs. Through my qualitative analysis of the stories making up this study, chapter 5 was formulated on narratives of my experiences entering the workforce. They range from my first entry-level position to later experiences of promotion and increasing power and influence. The stories encompass early microaggressions and slights received by colleagues, supervisor power dynamics, navigating my own increasing power as it intersects with being a Black Male, and the continued surveillance in and out of the workplace. These stories aim to illustrate the accumulation of experiences leading towards my experience with Racial Battle Fatigue.

First Job Experiences

My career in higher education student affairs began at an east coast small private university. The diverse student population were the most varied I had experienced with representation from differing ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, and religious backgrounds. Conversely, the staff and faculty racial diversity at this institution was very limited. I was the only Black employee in student affairs. I held the position of a traditional hall coordinator. This position typically consisted of living on campus in a university provided apartment within a residence hall area where I would be responsible for supervising resident advisors (student staff), participate in departmental committees, monitor facility's needs for my buildings, and plan social/academic programming for

residents who lived in my section of campus. I inherited a diverse staff with members of the Muslim, Jewish, Jain, and Christian faiths. Two of my staff members were students of color (Pakistani and Indian), two White orthodox Jewish students, and two white non-practicing ethnic Jewish students. The gender breakdown was 3 men and 3 woman, all junior and senior in status. I was able to develop strong relationships with the professional and student staff within the weeks and months of starting the position. The challenges I experienced with students were very normal in retrospect (parties, drug use, roommate issues, etc.), but my challenges with some of my professional colleagues were troublesome.

“Token Black Guy”

The university hired a new director for student conduct whom I worked with closely. He was a White male from another local university who took on this new position with a clear vision for what he expected in his role. While he did not have any direct evaluation responsibility over me, he was pretty strict in his expectations of the work we did together. He operated from an efficiency approach wanting any student conduct reports I oversaw to be completed in a timely manner. I had continued my self-care of working out in the mornings 5 days a week at this point in my life. One day, he asked me one day if he could join me at the gym for workout. This ostensible attempt to create a relationship with me outside of the work environment seemed initially positive. It lasted one workout. At the conclusion of our time at the gym he confronted me about my paperwork needing to be turned in to his office in a timelier fashion. He meandered in his explanation of his needs for his office and his discontent with the time it was taking me to complete some conduct cases. This confrontation was not aggressive, but it caught me off

guard considering the setting and purpose of our time together. My initially reaction was shock, then embarrassment for thinking that he wanted to social relationship, then anger at the whole scenario. However, I did not feel empowered to express to him my dissatisfaction of his timing and approach to bringing this matter up in a non-work situation. My trust for him in his personal outreach was broken by his ulterior motives. In the weeks that followed, I improved my performance to match his expectations and limited my contact with him to scheduled meetings. At one of these meetings, he caught my attention with an uncomfortable verbal exchange with another colleague.

In this meeting, our colleague was discussing a topic that I cannot recall when the colleague used the word “token.” The director of student conduct asked them to repeat themselves. Once the point was repeated, the director responded with “I thought you said token Black guy.” Even when clarifying his misunderstanding, I felt further discomfort in his rationale for needing to share what he thought he heard. Acutely aware that I was the only black person on the entire staff it jarred me emotionally. A challenge of being Black in White majority situations for me is the fear of being tokenized, including the feeling of not belonging. This was my first job after graduate school where I believed I earned it based on my education, ability to work with others, and experience. However, I could not help this repetitive cycle of resentment at my race being weaponized against me. I could feel myself starting to have shallow breaths, my heart rate started to pace, and I began to feel anger surfacing. Since he was a director in the division and I was an entry-level new employee, there was a power differential silenced me. In addition, he already confronted me in a previous encounter. I did not want react out of my emotions for fear of it being perceived as retaliatory by him and others. I was very aware of my position as the only

Black person on staff, and his clarification pushed that concern further into the forefront. I decided to ask to meet with him days later to share my discontent with his statement in the meeting. This was a very difficult thing to do due to the power dynamics within the division. However, I felt he needed to know that his words carried weight and that he needed to be more attuned to the impact of his position and language.

I emailed him to ask if we could meet, to which he agreed. By the time I reached his office, I made sure that I was calm emotionally in order to be as effective at the impending confrontation/correction. I shared with him that the statement he made he made during the meeting and really was something I was struggling with. I told him that I found it offensive, and that he needed to be careful about how he chose his words. He quickly apologized and explained that he did not mean anything to hurt my feelings or offend me. We wrapped up the meeting amicably, but I still carried with the feelings of this slight. Navigating this experience taught me that I needed to consider race in addition to other political dynamics of a work environment. This was quite disappointing considering my expectation for higher education being a progressive and welcoming environment to people of all backgrounds. It was important for me to anticipate these types of dynamics in future interactions with colleagues.

The Police Reenter

At the same university where I had this challenge with the director of student conduct, part of my responsibilities was partnering with university policy officers. This relationship was meant to be collaborative in that part of my role was to confront violations of policy and law and work with university police when appropriate. Working in the housing department also meant serving on an on-call rotation. This included

responding to after hour (5pm-8:30am) incidents or crises. When on-call, I needed quick access to my car to attend to emergencies, however the parking lot was a sizable walk from my on-campus apartment. In order to have faster access to my vehicle, I received permission from the director of my department to park adjacent to my apartment building. This resulted in university police officers asking me to move my vehicle. When I explained to them I was on-call and had permission from the director, these conversations ended without incident. These interactions continued to happen regardless of past conversations. In one incident, an officer confronted my then wife for parking the car next to the building. She called me very upset, so I rushed home, flustered, to have another conversation with an officer. The communication of this permission was not making its way through their department, which led to my increased agitation in interacting with university police. Eventually, this type of interaction took place in a location away from my apartment.

One morning, I drove to a section of campus to attend a staff meeting. While looking for a parking spot, I noticed a vehicle parked illegally in a non-demarcated location next to a legal marked parking spot. The legal parking spot was the only one available in the lot, but parking there would block the vehicle illegally parked from exiting its location. Needing to get to the meeting, I decided to park in the legal spot. As I exited my vehicle, the same officer who confronted my wife approached me. He instructed me to move my vehicle because it was blocking another vehicle. I declined his request informing him that I was parked legally, unlike the other vehicle. I offered him the option of calling the office where my meeting was taking place in case I needed to move my vehicle if the other person needed to leave. He told me that option would not

work, and threatened to tow my vehicle if I did not move my car. Frustrated with this second encounter with this particular officer, I challenged him by asking why he would tow my car when I was not the one parked illegally. He ignored my question and repeated his demand for me to move my vehicle. At that point, I told him that I could not understand why he felt the need to confront me multiple times (referring to the earlier apartment incident with my wife). The officer denied knowing who I was, which made me infuriated. I insisted that he did know me and related the previous encounter. He insisted he did know me and eventually walk away without incident. While I was able to move forward with my meeting, I walked away upset. This would not be my last interaction with officers from their department.

Several weeks later there was a late night incident where students pulled the fire alarm in my apartment building. This was a regular occurrence that happened in Residence Halls where students would pull fire alarms in non-emergency situation as a prank resulting in late night evacuations. Since I was used to these types of pranks happening, I decided to prepare for the next one by looking out my bedroom window that faced the building exit. Once the alarms sounded, I quickly woke up and peered through my window blinds towards the building exit. Immediately, I saw three male students quickly walking away from the building laughing. I was wearing shorts, a t shirt, and no shoes when I decided to run out of my apartment to confront the students. Once I caught up with the students, I identified myself as the staff member living in the building and instructed them to walk back into the building with me. They complied. Moments later, my wife carrying our three-year-old son wrapped in his blanket exited our ground floor apartment. The look on the three of their faces was shame and regret. Soon, university

police officers arrived. I met them at the entrance and explained to them that I caught the three people responsible for the prank. As two of the officers moved through the building to make sure no actual emergency was happening, they eventually shut off the fire alarm. The remaining officer continued to take my statement, then abruptly looked at me and asked “Is your name Josh?” I confirmed my name and staff title. This is where the tone of the interaction changed. He placed his notepad and pen in his shirt pocket and said “Sorry we can't do anything about it if you didn't see them actually pull the alarm. We have to let them go.” I immediately connected his confirmation of my name as him somehow knowing me even though we had never interacted before. I inferred that he and other officers may have talked about our multiple confrontations, which guided his decision. I also knew what he was saying was not the policy on how to handle these types of incidents. However, I decided not to challenge his statement since I felt I knew exactly what was happening. I felt powerless in this moment. Over the next days, I thought through what my options were. If this was going to be my relationship with university police, there would be an emotional toll taken. I eventually had to file a complaint with the chief diversity officer on campus.

The chief diversity officer heard my complaint and decided to speak with the chief of police. Subsequently, a meeting was called between the chief of police, the chief diversity officer, and the original officer who confronted my wife and me on separate occasions. It was less than a year, and I found myself having to address concerns with campus colleagues. In the meeting, we all shared our perspectives. At the conclusion of the meeting, the chief of police reaffirmed the commitment of officers in supporting me as a member of the campus community. After the meeting, I had no further

confrontations or problems with university police. In fact, they were quite accommodating and supportive. Escalating unresolved concerns was a tactic that I had to incorporate into my professional behaviors. However, I was left wondering how many of my White peers endured these types of interactions with university police. While the matter was resolved, the emotional toll remained. Between these challenges and my wife's growing homesickness, I made the decision to seek employment the following academic year closer to her family.

When I returned to the Midwest in the summer of 2003 to take a job managing dormitories, the relationship with a diverse university police department for was extremely pleasant. I enjoyed campus environments where police knew who I was, and I knew them by name. This was a powerful feeling. I often that this was what other people (nonblack male staff) felt like most of the time on campus in relation to campus police. Around this same time, my twin brother was completing his time in the law enforcement academy in the state of Iowa. My relationships with law enforcement was extremely positive at all levels. My career over the next 3 years increased in experience and responsibility. I started to believe that maybe this stage of police interaction in my life was ending. At the same time, I started to seek job opportunities that would advance. This was when I was hired as an Assistant Dean and Director of a housing program back in the state of Iowa at a small liberal arts college.

More Title, More Policing

I moved back to the state of Iowa with enthusiasm that my career was moving in the right direction. Although I made some significant sacrifices to take this position, I believed at the time that it was the right career move. Being the chief housing office at

this college came with a higher title and more responsibility. In the workplace, this position carried power. However, I immediately experienced a return of police interaction with city police. Within the first 6 weeks of moving to Iowa, I was pulled over twice without further incident, ticketing, or any additional consequences. After the second time, I knew these interactions had nothing to do with my driving status or anything legal. I believed it solely had to do with me being a Black male driving in this city. By the time I had my third interaction with police, I was acutely aware of police presence when I was driving.

A friend of mine needed help with assisting his cousin moving from her apartment in the same town as my campus apartment. We decided to drive separate vehicles, so I followed him through several blocks of neighborhoods. About five minutes into our drive, he called my cell phone and asked if I noticed the police car following us. I looked in my review mirror and noticed the police vehicle with two officers in the front seat following us. Since both of us were Black, I had strong sense of what was happening. As a test, my friend said he was going to make a couple random turns to see if they still were following us. The police vehicle remained behind us at every turn, without pulling us over. At one point, my friend called me and said he was going to pull over so we could get out of our vehicles and talk to each other. As we exited our vehicles, the police vehicle parked within our view on the adjacent street. I started to get frustrated considering this pattern of police surveillance had returned fully into my life. We decided to ignore the officers, returned to our respective vehicles, and continued our journey towards his cousin's apartment. I looked in my review mirror and noted the police vehicle still behind us. This started to feel like an intimidation tactic, which enraged me. I

called my friend back and told him that we needed to pull over again because I was going to confront the police. In retrospect, this was a dangerous thing to do. However, I was thinking emotionally and not rationally.

We pulled over, I exited my vehicle and walked up to the police officer who pulled over again. I did not know how the officer would react to my assertive approach. He rolled down his window, so I proceeded to ask the officer “Is there a reason why you’re following me?” He responded that they were not following me. I immediately disagreed and informed him I witnessed him follow me for several turns. I offered to show him my license and proof of insurance in order for him to stop his “harassment” of me. Visibly agitated, he exited his vehicle and approached me saying my taillights were out. I told him this was not true. The officer changed his line of explanation and said my friend’s seatbelt was unbuckled. I asked my friend if his seatbelt was unbuckled to which he responded with a “No.” The officer replied that he would issue my friend a ticket and they could figure it out in court. Exasperated at this response, I said something to the effect of “that’s fine.” The officer and I both started walking side-by-side towards my friend who was standing on the sidewalk. As we walked approached my friend, the officer stopped short and turned towards me. He looked at me in the eyes and said, “This has nothing to do with you. Go back to your vehicle.” I responded, “You got it...yep, you got the power.” Fortunately, my friend was able to deescalate the situation and left without the unwarranted ticket. Later, my friend told me that the officer said I was overreacting. I disagreed.

My son spent part of the month with me in Iowa during this time since his mother and I were divorced. For several reasons, including this discriminatory repetitive

treatment by the police, I decided that I did not want to raise him in that community. These interactions were taking a toll on my stress levels. Between being away from my son, and these hostile encounters with police, I ended up having to seek medical treatment due to an irregular heartbeat. What's notable is the challenges of the work environment were easier to manage than just living in the city. My final police encounter in this city was the first time I had a White friend witness the interaction.

One night, the head soccer coach (a White male) and I drove to a couple of bars to have some drinks. I made sure to monitor how much I was drinking in order to not be over the legal limit (less than one drink every 1.5 hours). We left the first bar and decided to take my vehicle to another part of town to check out another bar. About 10 minutes into our drive, I noticed a police vehicle in the left turning lane at the stop light. Since our light was green, I continued through the intersection. Wary of police presence, I peered through my rearview mirror and noticed the police vehicle turn right instead of left in order to follow my vehicle. The officer pulled up to my right side next to where my friend was sitting. She slowly increased her speed and looked past my friend to make eye contact with me. Immediately, her vehicle slowed down and she pulled over immediately behind me and lit her police lights and sounded her siren. My friend immediately asked why we were getting pulled over to which I explained to him that this happened all the time. He was appalled and angered immediately.

I pulled into an empty parking lot and observed her carefully approach my vehicle. I already pulled out my license and proof of insurance. I knew I had done nothing wrong, but I was oddly calm. After I settled my friend down (a behavior I had to repeat later with another White friend), I answered the officer's questions of where we

were coming from (a bar) and where we were heading to (another bar). She in response, decided to conduct a breathalyzer test. Since I was clearly under the limit, she took my license and went back to her vehicle to run my information. After about 15 minutes, she returned to my vehicle and told us we were free to go. Before we parted ways, I asked her the reason for why she pulled me. She told me that my driver's license was from out of state. It seemed to be a reactive response since there was no way she could tell I had an out of state license from looking at my vehicle. It was clear to my friend and I that this was not a reason to be pulled over. I responded with "thank you," and we drove off. I grew both in more certainty of my need to move from this town along with my resentment of hypersurveillance by police. There were plenty of personal reasons for wanting to relocate back to St. Louis. However, these police interactions in Iowa gave me every incentive to move back. Unfortunately, while my experiences with campus police in St. Louis were consistently positive, the city and county offered a very different experience dynamic.

Hypersurveillance Continued

In the summer of 2007, I was able to secure a management position back at my housing department. Career-wise, this was a lateral move in responsibility, but in a familiar town. With more responsibility, I was able to interact with contracted staff not connected to the university. One of these staff members was a security guard for one of our properties. He was a Black male in his mid-twenties who was interested in my role and what I did to support students. After building rapport with him for months, I invited him to meet with me during my off hours to support his transition back to college. I had

some vacation time schedule, so we decided to meet at a local sandwich shop to eat and go over his financial aid processing and academic transcripts for his applications.

I was surprised yet happy to see that he brought his cousin along with him for this meeting. His cousin was similar to him in age, and both were clearly looking for a way to advance their life through education. This opportunity was much more of a dream for me, even though they expressed gratitude for my time spent with them. I treated them to lunch and we found a table to start our work on their respective processes. As we moved through some of the more complex financial aid questions, I noticed to city police officers enter the shop. One was Black and one was White, both males. Although I had not had any run-ins with police during my time in St. Louis, I was hyper aware due to my recent year in Iowa.

As they walked by our table, I made eye contact with both officers. They passed our table and seemingly went towards the line to order. For a moment, a sigh of relief came over me as I thought that St. Louis officers were seemingly different from my experiences in Iowa. Moments later, both officers walked past our table again. This time, the Black officer looked at me and smirked as he passed our table. Again, no incident. I began growing firm in my assessment of these local police. Then without notice, both officers returned to our table. One of the officers asked our group to confirm whose laptop it was that we were using. My heartrate began to elevate, but then I realized the two young men sitting were present. I felt the overwhelming urge to stay calm and protect them.

I responded to the officers acknowledging it was mine. When I inquired what the concern was, they told me that someone had called them reporting a laptop that looked

like one that was stolen from them was at our table. Immediately, I thought this was an excuse for them to follow up on their own hunch. My stomach was in knots at the chance they may have been telling the truth. I told my work for Washington University at the laptop was used as part of my job responsibilities. The two young men, started to get agitated, so I returned my attention to them encouraging them that I had the situation under control. One of the officers requested to inspect the computer including looking at the serial ID number. I complied, and went the step further of pointing out the sticker adhered to it stating it was property of my university. In addition, I provided my driver's license and business card confirming my identity and place of employment. After several moments of them looking over my identification and writing down the serial number, the officers left without incident. However, the three of us were left stunned.

Immediately, one of the young men said "that was some bullshit." We spent the next 15 minutes processing what we just experienced. I was hurting for them more than anything. At this point in their lives, I knew they had experienced hypersurveillance by police, and I hoped it would not derail their focus on their future. We tried to continue to work, but agreed to stop our work early due to one of them suddenly having something they needed to attend to. We never met again.

The situation again was embarrassing. In the middle of the restaurant, in front of other patrons, we were labeled suspects. I felt shame, a deep sadness, and disappointment that I was wrong about the city I had returned to. Even more difficult is that I felt like a suspect, uncomfortable with the stares of the patrons even after the event. Worst of all for me was my race getting in the way of my ability to do good for others. I felt like I had failed them, and racism prevailed. While I made several attempts to meet with the young

man after this incident, we never met again. The opportunity was lost. Challenges in the workplace proved that my increasing power was not protective of these racial indignations.

More Title, Less Power

Moving up in student affairs administration meant access to power in terms of being a key decision maker in the housing positions I was charged in leading. Despite the staff who reported to me and the increased access to powerful administrators across campus, I still encountered racial slights from colleagues and staff well beyond this time. This ranged from colleagues restating my words in meetings as in attempts to translate my messaging in ways they thought our colleagues needed during meetings and presentations. I was consistently mistaken for other Black faculty and staff. Initially, I would not correct people's mistakes. In time I decided to consistently correct people to their embarrassment and apologies. I learned that it was not my responsibility to make them feel comfortable when they made these types of errors. Additionally, I started to experience staff I was supervising challenge me in ways my White colleagues did not.

The race of the staff didn't seem to be an indicator of this type of boundary testing. This ranged from efforts by my subordinates to align with each other in dissatisfaction with decisions I made to one employee yelling at me that I was a "horrible supervisor" after I corrected an action he took. My emotional response to this particular interaction was complete rage. However, I had to restrain my emotions in order to protect myself. With these challenges, I utilized supervisors, mentors, and human resources to appropriately address each incident. These were learning experiences. All of them reminded me of stories from my mentors of color who shared how their competency was

challenged differently as compared to their White counterparts. In addition to these challenges, there were campus colleague situations where interpreting politics and race was a constant. In these situations, I had to find creative ways to leverage power and navigate passive resistance towards me carrying out my responsibilities.

The Old Boys Club

Working in student housing required some level of responsibility in meeting the physical needs of the buildings. As an associate director, this meant working closely with facilities managers within my department along with university-wide leadership who oversaw facility needs. One of the meetings I attended regularly were with this group. In these meetings, we would discuss issues that needed attention broadly within the residence halls, large scale capital projects, and anything else related to this area. As the representative of my department, I was always the only Black male in these meetings. There would usually be 6-8 facilities managers and staff who were all White. Negotiations, collaborations, debates, and planning would take up most of the time with the more senior members doing most of the talking. One of the characteristics of the meeting I noticed fairly early was the body language of my colleagues. Often, they would sit in the room leaning back in their seats, hands crossed behind their heads, taking the power poses seen in many business environments by men taking up large spaces to display dominance. They would ask a lot of questions and share technical terms outside of my range of understanding of these projects. I had to exert extra energy to navigate these challenging spaces. This technical jargon around facilities materials, tools, and projects was a great opportunity to gain a new knowledge set, and I was happy to be there to be the voice of my department. However, I noticed much of what I said or requested

got little attention and rebuttal. I needed another tactic to be effective since I sensed I was not able to represent the needs of my department effectively.

There was another manager who was a White male who shared the same role as mine. For one particular meeting, a request needed to go out that I could not allow to fail, so I invited him to the meeting with me. Prior to the meeting, I would share with my White departmental colleague the goals we needed to get accomplished through our requests. I then asked him if he would go with me to argue on behalf of the department. He agreed to attend. This strategy was effective in that when he talked, they listened. When he made the recommendation and argued its merits, they responded affirmatively. My emotional response to this was relief, in spite of the clear difference in treatment of my colleague due to my focus on the bigger needs of my department. When I thought of these strategies in the years to come, I did build some resentment of the maneuvering around race that was needed. It also reaffirmed how my positional power would continue to be muted by my race

Staff Revolt

My career continued to move forward with my recruitment to become the director of a housing program at another St. Louis institution. This was a major move providing me the responsibility of a large department with a significant staff base. My role on campus was the chief housing office of a fairly large operation that housed over 3800 students from first-year through senior year in residence halls and apartments. It was a very complex unit with over 18 full-time staff. It was to be a promising career point where the next likely step would pivot my career towards senior leadership. These were exciting times. As I took time to get to know my leadership team and the larger team, I

knew there were many areas I needed to improve. This included increasing diversity amongst our team. During my first semester, we embarked on a hiring process that spring of 2011. In most American higher education housing departments, hiring entry-level residence hall staff takes place in the spring with the positions starting July 1st in the academic fiscal year start. We delegated hiring responsibilities to an Assistant Director and empowered him to put together a committee with several entry-level residence hall professional staff. After interviewing applicants at national conferences, the Assistant Director was to take feedback from his committee, vet it with his supervisor (the Associate Director), then present who they wanted to bring to campus as finalists. The Assistant Director was a Latino male who was wary about the lack of diversity the staff committee wanted to advance in the hiring process, so he proposed to add several candidates of color that he deemed fit. The Associate Director and I agreed to this decision as it met our goals for a more representative and diverse finalist pool.

The evening the campus interviews were announced to the staff, a member of the residence hall staff sent me an email deriding the decision to not push forward the group of applicants he and his entry-level colleagues recommended. His argument was that diversity was “more than just race” and that he disagreed with my decision to change their recommendations. Since his email was full of assumptions and assertions, I called him in for a meeting the next day. He came to my office that morning ready to discuss the matter with me. I told him that he made a lot of assumptions in his email and my expectation is he would ask more questions instead of making accusations when talking to the director of the department. I informed them that I supported the decision of my leadership team as to who they invited to campus. Finally, I admonished his words and

his accusatory, inaccurate tone. He apologized and left my office. Word of our conversation got back to the rest of the entry-level staff. Within days their continued discontent and complaints made their way to my leadership team. They felt that they were not heard and that my decision to bring candidates of color along with white candidates did not honor their part in the process. To address these concerns directly, I decided to have a meeting with the entire staff to hear their concerns and redirect their expectations.

During this meeting, the entry-level residence hall staff was given a chance to share their concerns. One of the staff members said that she felt that diversity was more than just race. She emphasized that they were people who could be white but also could be first-generation college graduates, rural raised, and low income backgrounds were missing out on based on this decision. After all was shared I made several points before concluding the meeting.

I responded to the entire team know that there were a couple things that they needed to understand. My first point of clarification was as entry-level staff members their job was to make interview recommendations, however those were not final decisions. Second, I delineated their role as entry-level staff members meant they would not have the responsibility of hiring same level colleagues at our department or any other institution. I restated that their job was to provide recommendations only. Finally I said to them that the statements that they are making about diversity being not just race was problematic. I shared what concerned to me was when they said “diversity is not just race,” what I heard was diversity is *beyond* race. I reminded them of the demographics of the candidates they recommended to bring to campus had all forms of diversity *beyond*

race. Further, I asked them to consider the makeup of our team (that I inherited). We had returning members on our team who identified as LGBTQ community, rural backgrounds, and former first-generation college students. All White. Based on their outcomes of their recommendations, it appeared that their concerns about diversity were really more connected to people who were like them. I ended the meeting by letting them know that if they said the “diversity *is* race and class and socioeconomic status...” I would agree with their paradigm in the hiring process.

One of the White woman staff members began to cry in response to my concluding thoughts. The original employee who contacted me attempted to comfort her by putting his arm around her shoulders, to which she immediately rebutted with a shoulder shrug. Later, I found out that she was crying because she knew I was correct. The staff left in silence. As I reflected immediately on this experience, I realized that my firmness in the matter was needed. It was an opportunity for me to set boundaries with the entire group. Their race-privilege had no bearing in this setting. It needed to be made clear that I was ultimately responsible for the department. The original White male staff member resigned at the end of the fiscal year, and we successfully hired a very diverse incoming group. This was not the first time racialized tensions would show up in my career. I began to accept this condition as permanent.

Weaponizing Black Maleness

As my first year as director was almost complete, a member of my leadership team received an opportunity for a promotion at another university. This left a vacancy, and my associate director was to oversee this process. This process would not include the earlier staff as we were searching for a smaller candidate pool. During the year, I made an

effort to develop relationships with the entire staff. This included one on one meetings to get to know them, their professional ambitions, and their needs for support. One of the staff members was a newer White woman who worked in our main office. After the position was posted she came to me with enthusiasm of her decision to apply for the vacant position. I shared with her that I admired her initiative and that I looked forward to seeing how the process played out.

It became quickly apparent to the search committee that her lack of experience compared to the candidate pool would result in her not being selected as a finalist. While we could have moved her forward as a courtesy interview where she could gain some experience from going through the process, we agreed not to advance her. After the finalists had been made public, I braced myself for a potentially difficult discussion with her.

One afternoon, she knocked on my office door and asked to meet with me. I invited her in. She appeared agitated, so I asked her to share what was on her mind. She held a copy of resume in her hand and began to ask me why she was not advanced in the process. When I began to tell her about the disparity in her experience compared to the candidates, she interrupted me and pointed out specific points on her resume comparing them to the other candidates. My heart began to race, so I decided to let her finish what she had to say. I thanked her and told her I would look into the matter further and follow up with her. My hope was this would give her and me time to calm down while I gathered specific feedback from the hiring committee.

After roughly one week, I invited her into my office. This time, she seemed decisively calm in her demeanor. I thanked her for meeting with me and continued to

share some specific feedback as to why she wasn't advanced. Although she interpreted my initial reaction to her announcing that she was applying for the position as my affirming her qualifications, I hoped that she understood why she was not advanced in the process. Finally, I shared with her that joining a leadership team would likely require positive relationships with that team given the access she had. I placed my knuckles together and said if there's "friction," while rubbing my knuckles together, then that would likely cause hesitancy in these types of hiring processes. After our short conversation, she left my office. Weeks later, I received a notification from our equity and discrimination office regarding a formal complaint being submitted against my associate director who was leading the search.

When I arrived at the meeting, the staff member overseeing the investigation explained that most of these cases were likely "miscommunication." He went on to share that my associate director was being accused of discriminating against this same staff member who applied to the vacancy due to her being pregnant. I was shocked by this accusation as her pregnancy status had never come up as a reason to explain why she was not advanced in the process. I did not believe this to be the case. At this moment, I decided to share my side of the hiring process. This included revealing to the investigator that my associate director herself was pregnant. This was unknown to the investigator, so it was noted. Finally, there was one more matter the investigator needed to discuss with me.

He shared that my complainant staff member described a conversation where I balled my fists and put them together. As the investigator repeated the same action with his knuckles to demonstrate what he was referring to, he shared that this staff member felt

my gesture was aggressive and intimidating. I felt the air taken away from me in awe and frustration. As calmly as I could, I shared with him the words I used when making that gesture. I added that I was concerned of how my race and gender played into this interpretation of my body language. He quickly backed off that part of the conversation without any further feedback stating that he would follow up with me on the investigation of my team member.

The fact that this investigation of a team member whom I agreed with in their action included an accusation that felt racially charged was distressing. Tension seemed high in our office the weeks to follow as the investigation concluded. There were no violations found, and the accusations were dismissed with some light feedback. Soon thereafter, the complainant resigned from her position. While this issue had passed, this accusation felt very dangerous for me. With visions of false accusations of Black men and White women highlighted in this situation, my vigilance at how I interacted with people on my team needed to increase to protect myself from racially and gendered interactions.

Discussion

Powerlessness

In reflecting on my first experience working with the director of student conduct in my first professional position, his clarification on whether someone used the words “token Black guy” sets up a specific dilemma around powerlessness. Early in a career, my fear of reprise or political conflict had to be weighed against my desire to confront this slight. Even after the confrontation, I was left with the questioning of merit of my employment. These feelings were reminiscent of my undergraduate experience listening

to a peer give the speech on Black student college admission and scholarship awarding where he argued against his interpretation of some form of affirmative action. While I was able to provide a counter response, I was still left holding on to the racialized offense and anger while simultaneously questioning my merit. The same can be said for the interaction with the director of student conduct. Even after my private confrontation, I was left damaged. Davidson and Friedman (1998) state “The harm-doer may then falsely believe that the situation is settled and stop worrying about managing the conflict. In such a case, negative feelings would linger, and the manager would not be aware of it or, if the manager were aware, he or she might well be surprised that such feelings persist” (p. 177). This was another added slight in a lifetime of microaggressions (passive and aggressive) based on my race. Navigating my position as an entry-level while confronting a mid-level manager was stressful and exhausting. Moving up in position did not mitigate various microaggressions from colleagues and supervisees.

Power

One of the challenges to this research is the lack of literature on experiences of Black managers and supervisors in higher education administration. This chapter illustrates my experience rising in the ranks while addressing challenges by colleagues, peers, and supervisees. Some of these encounters demonstrated general hostility towards me in my capacity, while race was directly involved in others. The consistent mundane racial microaggressions still seemed to have a cumulative effect. There are studies related to Black managers in other professions (e.g. business) that may provide some insights to potentially shared experiences. Part of that research has focused on perspectives of employees of Black managers.

Regarding my experience with colleagues and supervisees clarifying my statements in meetings and presentations, there seems to be a difference between my perceived communication abilities and their perceptions of the same. I am a well experienced public speaker, teacher, and podcast host. All of these areas need no justification outside of this context. I regularly receive high praise for my oratory skills by supervisors and colleagues alike. Yet, these corrections have happened regardless of my positional power or expertise. One reason may be the mental shortcuts assumed with race and speech. Being Black and inarticulate is usually my first interpretation of these interactions. Another could be the perception of my supervisees of my abilities. According to one research study surveying graduate and undergraduate students, “Black managers were characterized as lacking polish, compared to White managers” (Block et al, 2012, p.141). While these incidents have happened with master’s degree level professional supervisees, these perceptions may transition from their educational to professional perspectives on Black managers like myself. My emotional reaction to these corrections or unwarranted interpretations has been frustration, anger, stress, and eventual insecurity in questioning my own ability to communicate effectively. The frequency of this type of microaggression is cause for concern on its addition to the cumulative effect of perceived racial slights.

Additional slights addressed in this chapter included the treatment by White male facilities managers in meetings. From unwritten behaviors like the use of body language to display power to discounting my authorized requests, navigating race is a constant. Mackay and Etienne (2006) states a “key issue was the extent to which the managers received support and in particular how relationships at work could make a positive

contribution to the individual's attitude to his or her work, career advancement, professional identity and development" (p. 16). Feeling a lack of power in these meetings required utilizing a White male colleague to speak on my behalf in order to be effective. While this form of ally work was appreciated at this point in my career, my lack of acceptance with this group rendered me ineffective in the need to double resources in order to get things accomplished. My experience with staff under my supervision was filled with similar challenges.

Questioning my decisions to support bringing underrepresented minority job candidates to campus directly placed race at the center of conflict in my work at the St. Louis based university. Staff willing to confront me personally without consideration of how confrontations took place gave me consternation. The White male subordinate's email accusing me directly of unfairness while not directing his concerns to the hiring committee chair left my interpretation of his actions as being bolstered by his racial identity. As a White junior staff member, his boldness in this confrontation was anger inducing and infuriating. The larger group follow up conversation was no less frustrating. Having to leverage my positional power as the chief housing officers was immediately effective, but left me experiencing promotion as not a protective factor when combined with my Blackness. I cannot say for certain what the group's perception of my words were as a result of that meeting, but the incident with the aspiring staff member left out of the interview process for a promotion was clear.

While her accusations of discrimination were baseless, her portrayal of my aggressive body language was professionally dangerous. This false flag reminds of me of current use of the name "Karen" as a pejorative. In modern times, White women making

racist accusations in anger and falsified fear are considered Karens. The May 2020 incident involving a White woman named Amy Cooper is an example of this. Amy Cooper was walking her dog in Central Park, NY where a Black man named Christian Cooper (not related) was bird watching. When he asked her to put her dog on a leash as required by law, she rebutted his request. He subsequently offered her dog a treat to which she told him not to touch her dog. As his camera phone documented, she threatened to call 9-1-1 and tell them “there’s an African-American man threatening my life.” She then proceeds to follow through on her threat weaponizing race and policing. While the incident ends with both parties leaving the location without further issues, her video was shared widely on social media and news outlets. It received a large public response which resulted in her losing her job. In my situation with the unhappy employee who was not advanced in our search process, her remarks regarding my “threatening” gesture had similar undertones weaponizing my intersection of Black and male identities. This fits the mental model Morales (2016) describes where “Black men tend to be perceived as much more physically intimidating” (p. 61). These types of accusations have historical threat trauma associated with them leading back to the death of Emmitt Till. The consequences personally and professionally can be dire. I realized in this moment that not only can my Black maleness be questioned when it came to my authority, but it had the potential to jeopardize my professional safety.

Career Surveillance

As illustrated in the various encounters with campus police at the east coast university along with my interactions once returning to St. Louis, interactions with police acted as a reoccurring microaggression. Even moving to a nice neighborhood, placing my

son in the highest performing public school, and attaining career advancement did not protect me from these interactions. Sewella et al. (2016) state “Regardless of income or neighborhood, Blacks are the frequent targets of surveillance and distrust by law enforcement. Implicit bias is evident when Blacks are assumed to be ‘guilty’ of an offense, even when none has been committed” (p. 297). This indeed has been my experience moving in every state I’ve worked in, both on and off campus. Race of the police officers off campus had no bearing on being picked as a suspect. Sewella et al. continue, “the racial or ethnic composition of law enforcement does not guarantee less surveillance, arrest, and detention” (p. 298). The scope of this study does not cover racial composition of police officers, but the system of surveillance in the literature matched my experiences. What’s challenging in this regard is the impact on these incidents that cannot be separated from the accumulation of other racial slights. What I experienced through the continual police interaction was an internalization of feeling like a suspect. I started to question what I was doing wrong potentially at all times. Additionally, I started to feel guilty even though these types of police interaction were unwarranted.

With incidents stemming from childhood through mid-career piling up, the effects exacerbated some personal life challenges leading ultimately to Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF) impacting my career decisions and ultimately my employment. The next chapter aims to pull a selection of incidents and the resulting RBF experience together.

CHAPTER 6

RACIAL BATTLE FATIGUE: BEFORE AND AFTER

Introduction

This chapter is focused on my timeline as a manager from 2006 to present day. It details additional stories of the impact of conflict in my personal and professional life resulting in my lowest points through finding ways to cope. Throughout this time, I recalled work incidents, police interaction, and personal relationships leading me down a path of failure and redemption. I continued to endure what I perceived as racialized slights from law enforcement, colleagues, and staff well beyond as I continued to transition to manager positions in higher education and the nonprofit sector. The entire time, I was enduring some averaged life challenges. Despite some personal setbacks in the form of a divorce from my son's mother and the task of adjusting to not seeing him every day, I continued to advance in my career.

The Beginning of the End

As my career continued moving forward, supervisees challenged me in inappropriate ways. The race of the staff didn't seem to be an indicator of this boundary testing. While many people experience these types of boundary testing by subordinates, there were efforts by my subordinates to align with each other in dissatisfaction with decisions I made. This showed up in various forms, including one employee saying to me that I was a "horrible supervisor" after I corrected an action he took. Per the university's human resources advice along with my supervisor's guidance, I addressed these inappropriate discussions with official corrective actions and documentation. These were

good learning experiences, but it reminded me of stories from my mentors of color who shared how their competence was challenged differently as compared to their White counterparts. There were challenging situations where my title and position had no evaluative responsibility with the challenging parties on staff. Through some rewarding and challenging experiences, I was recruited to direct a local housing program in St. Louis. While my professional advancement seemed to be progressing, both my professional and personal life would encounter more difficulties.

Personal and Professional Overload

Prior to the starting the director position, I was involved in a toxic romantic relationship with a woman I met through a local fellowship program. She and I had much in common: we were both twins, born in the same year, and single parents of one child each. Life seemed to be moving forward positively with a new job an impending proposal to get married. After 5 years since my divorce, I was eager to settle down in a committed relationship. In retrospect, I was aware of the mismatch between my significant other and me, but I moved forward with the relationship. We wed in 2011, shortly after I started my new director role. Things between us were peaceful for the first month but quickly started to break down. There were many behaviors she displayed that I did not agree with but chose to ignore for the sake of love. This is the first time why I lived with somebody who drank alcohol on a regular basis. She was a daily drinker of wine and other spirits and I quickly joined her in that behavior. These were my choices and I take full responsibility, but I do know that it encouraged me to develop some habits and behaviors that were going to be very detrimental to my future. Unfortunately this relationship quickly dissolved as our behaviors and drinking related experiences made it untenable. At the

same time I started my PhD program at the University of Missouri St Louis, I had taken another job promotion at another local university, and my salary was at his highest level. Yet the collective trauma of my past and my failed relationships all began to take its toll.

By the time my second wife and I ended our relationship my social drinking on the weekends that escalated to every night of the week. I moved to my new apartment and began to drink on a nightly basis. This was accompanied by a deep depression that resulted in me taking a medical leave from work. These were very dark times. I remember very many mornings waking up and thinking to myself, "I'm still here? Oh well." I became very suicidal, yet I didn't have a plan to kill myself. Behaviors that I did included driving while under the influence of alcohol at very high rate of speed, and having fleeting thoughts form of a horrible accident which would result in the loss of my life. It was a coward's way out in my mind. However, I thought that people would interpret not as suicide, but merely a bad mistake by a person who was down on his luck. While my home life had become tenuous, my work life was not any better.

Trouble at Work

My role at work started slightly prior to the marriage. I was hired to this director role at the same time my supervisor was hired as the Assistant Vice President (Derek). He was a Filipino man, about 5 years my senior, and had many common friends in our industry. I can recall the healthier times at work where he would spend every meeting with me critiquing my performance and looking for ways for me to improve. He would display other behaviors like making me sit outside of his office for an additional 5-10 minutes before commencing our one on one meetings, despite me arriving on time or even early to our weekly appointments. When I would submit weekly reports, Derek

would return them to me every week with edits as if I was submitting them to a top tier journal. There were few moments of praise, and he shared general dissatisfaction with my performance. When I was accepted to present with my mentors at a national conference, he denied my attendance while allowing my staff to attend. I felt betrayed by a man of color whom I thought would be a supporter of my role in a challenging institution. His disregard for my experience and his inability to support me in the ways I needed was confusing. This was the first supervisor that was a person of color in my professional experience, yet I experienced him as the least supportive and developmental superior I ever had to that point. With my home life and work life in disarray, I fell into a deep depression.

While on medical leave, Derek initiated an investigation regarding me with my staff leadership team. By this time, some members of my team became increasingly dissatisfied with my absence and provided Derek with their perspective on my performance. Eventually, Derek backed off his investigation of me, but members of my staff informed me that others were participating. I was totally undermined in my ability to return to my leadership role. Despite the Vice President offering to restructure the division in which I would work directly for him, I realized that I could not continue in this environment. My contempt for an organization that recruited me with the promise of social justice and inclusion being at its core was very different from the racial and anti-LGBTQ policies and behaviors that continued on. I realized that there were not many reasons I could come up with to stay with the campus. In March of 2013 I resigned from my position in spite of the offer to realign my role to not interact with this supervisor.

With a severance package in hand, I spent the next month increasing my drinking to a tremendous level. A six pack of beer a night turned into a twelve pack of beer each night. I would visit local bars any night my son was not with me, and would drink myself to sleep starting at dinner and well beyond his bedtime. These behaviors continued along with long days of sleeping and waking hours of looking forward to numbing my fear and pain with alcohol. On April 12, 2013 I decided to meet a friend at a local bar.

While this was not the first night I had encountered trouble drinking at this point of my life, this would be the final night for almost a year that I consumed alcohol. My friend and I started at one bar and consumed large quantities of alcohol. Somewhere in the evening, he asked me if I wanted to get some cocaine. I had never used cocaine before, but I was fully open to the idea of abusing my body this night. I decided to join him on a drive from Clayton, Missouri to downtown St. Louis to meet his contact on a street to purchase the drug. We went back to his apartment where I had the first few lines of cocaine, followed by smoking marijuana that he already possessed. After this point, my recollection is not clear. I remember talking to a lot of people at a local bar, then being in a taxicab, an altercation with the driver, running, falling twice, then being in the hospital. As I woke up in the hospital, I was standing up with my friend (Sarah) in the hospital room with me, an officer whom I recognized as giving me a ride home when I was drunk just months before, and a nurse repeating questions to me.

Nurse: "Hey, hey! Did you do anything besides alcohol?"

Me: "Yes, cocaine and marijuana."

Nurse: (shocked) "Are you serious?"

Me: "Yes."

I looked over to the police officer and said, “Hey I know you.” He replied, “Yep, I can’t help you this time buddy.” I replied, “Oh, okay” then blacked out again. The next morning I woke up on my living couch with the right side of my face stuck to the couch pillow. I got up, immediately went to the bathroom and saw a grotesque sight. The right side of my face was swollen beyond recognition around my right eye and upper cheek. My right lateral incisor was broken into the shape of a guillotine blade. I had no idea what happened. There was a text message on my phone from my friend Sarah that instructed me to call her when I woke up. I followed the directions and Sarah immediately headed to my apartment to speak with me.

She told me the parts she could recall, including police involvement. I was arrested that evening and released to her custody. This was the first time I asked myself, “How did I get here?” I had seemingly done all the “right” things in life, yet I was at one of the lowest parts of my life due to my decisions. In retrospect, I had not always done the right thing. I had some behaviors of problem drinking in undergraduate school that subsided when I started focusing on graduate school and becoming a father. I had depression-like symptoms throughout my youth connected to many of the traumas I had experienced throughout my life. My sense of self-worth had peaked making it through it all, yet I found myself in a low point in life when my behavior choices to cope with all of my past and current struggles surfaced. Something had to change, and I needed to find a way to get back on track personally and professionally despite my past choices and regardless of how the world treated me.

The Best Thing

There was an important moment prior to my arrest that served a purpose when I needed it. Shortly after I quit my director role, a friend and mentor met with me at a restaurant. She listened to my complaints about the job I left and encouraged me by reframing my employment situation by asking me, “Why is this the best thing that could happen to you at this point in your life?” While this did not immediately pull me out of my path to my low point(s), it was a question I asked myself repeatedly in order to pull myself out of dark places. My son loved me despite being what I considered to be the worst father at that point. My choices and behaviors were dangerous, yet he told me that I was his hero. Finally, friends I met in Alcoholics Anonymous (which I stayed with for 15 months after the April 2013 incident) normalized the human experience of making mistakes. Several Black mentors talked with me about how to navigate leadership roles in higher education, especially with difficult employees and supervisors. The Black men and women who shared their input fortified me for next career moves as I began to transition back into the work force. Finally, counseling services were critical in helping me talk through some of the more challenging areas of my life. My therapist helped me accept anger that I thought disappeared from the abandonment of my Father. In a *Goodwill Hunting* moment, my therapist asked me out of nowhere, “Why are you angry?” I quickly denied that I was angry. To that, he responded multiple times with the same question, “Why are you angry?” After several more denials, I began to cry and share my pain and hurt from the loss of my dad to my frustrations with the world. It was my anger against racism I endured on a regular basis that pained me. It was me letting my son, my family, and myself down that made me angry. It was the fact that I was afraid that made me angry. It was many things that I had to accept in myself before I could start

a path towards improving. As with all things, the progress was not linear. However, my resilience and ability to bounce back with every future setback was grounded in my relationships. Friends and family who supported me through housing, food, money, and challenged me to increase my belief in self-efficacy seemed to be critical.

The early lessons of hard work were critical during these moments. I recalled my mother's efforts to work multiple jobs to keep her family fed while sending money back to Uganda. I reflected in my darkest times how she was able to find the drive to complete these seemingly impossible responsibilities while never leaning on vices of drugs and alcohol. She seemed to lean on her faith in God and hard work. I realized that I needed to do that and more considering the decisions I made that brought me to the place I was in. I began to attend church in addition to my AA meetings, and during two points of unemployment I searched for employment as a full-time occupation. When I lost energy or started to feel depressed, I did not isolate. I called my twin brother for encouragement and sometimes a firm push to keep moving. It made me realize that no matter how the world treated me and how I treated myself, if I kept working and trying to serve others, what I needed to happen (employment, housing) would happen.

Life after Burnout

After leaving higher education for a nonprofit college access program, I experienced the same challenges with my staff. The usual boundary testing of my employees and my growing consistency in setting and resetting boundaries became a skill I started to feel more accustomed to. The nonprofit I worked for had no official religious affiliation, but it was founded by a Jesuit priest in the late 1970s. The program aim was to provide housing for low income students from middle to high school initially, although

they had taken in a 7 year old prior to my arrival. These students all had various challenges at home in the forms of poverty, drug addiction, abuse, and other factors. Many of their parents were directly involved in their lives, but some were not. Working with these students humbled me.

I heard stories that were some of the most disturbing accounts of these students' backgrounds. While I had endured trauma in my upbringing, it paled in comparison to the ravages of drugs and maltreatment these young people endured. Still, my job was to support my staff and ultimately the success of the students. The nonprofit I worked for also had a nonresidential partnership with the Ferguson-Florissant School district, working with a middle and high school. While we spent less time with these students, I was able to get to know many of them well. Working with these students gave me perspective on the impact of race, poverty, and trauma as well as resilience of youth. I was fortunate to have an Executive Director supervisor who helped me with my transition into this complex world. He had been part of this nonprofit for many years and was awarded a promotion to the international office located in a suburb of St. Louis. This left a vacancy that the board of directors filled within months after an exhausting a difficult search. The person they hired (Jeff) was a social worker who also worked in sales at a construction company. Since the nonprofit was building a new site for the homes and administrative offices, he was brought on board to oversee this effort.

Inheriting new supervisors was a new experience for me. In my earlier stories of leadership with challenging supervisees, I was often a new leader in a department where colleagues and staff had to adapt to my needs and vice versa. The new executive director (Jeff) immediately made attempts to demonstrate his authority. He constantly berated me

in front of other staff, confronted me in our one-on-one meetings, and gave me a really hard time from the start. I understood that has a new leader in the organization hot sometimes they want to bring their own management or at least hire their own management. I was an inherited staff member and understood the dynamics of new leadership. No matter how much I tried to appeal to him by saying that I work hard for the organization and I would always make him look good, he rebuffed my attempts.

Jeff continued to admonish me in our one on one meetings regarding the late start of professional development gatherings of my team, critique our programming efforts, and question me on all matters of programming. While he did not hold an educational background, he was not searching for answers to increase knowledge. I perceived his questions as information gathering as to what was wrong. I had experienced this type of behavior in my previous challenging higher education supervisor, so I tried several tactics to gain his favor. I worked harder than before, even though I regularly worked well over 40 hours a week. I reported all activities on a regular basis to him, and I explicitly stated that I was there for the success of him and the program. He scoffed at my offer and leveled more challenges. When one of our collegiate students had some legal difficulties, a staff member and I drove to Jefferson City, Missouri to be with him for his court hearing. When I returned, Jeff asked me if I was involved in a romantic relationship with that staff member. This was the first time anyone accused me of such conduct, and I was deeply offended. These caustic one on one meetings continued throughout 4 months under his supervision.

The final moment that secured my decision to resign from this position was made during one of our final one on one meetings. Jeff asked me if I was aware of the strategic

plan of the organization. When I replied that I did not have access to this, he pulled out a stapled piece of paper and handed it to me. It was a review sheet. Jeff informed me that he was going to set a list of goals and deliverables every week for us to review. He shared with me that I would be evaluated weekly on these deliverables, and that if I was unable to meet these expectations, we would have a different conversation. Fortunately, I was working with an executive coach during this time who anticipated that Jeff was trying to work me out of the program. My experience in management had shown me that organizations protect leadership, and since I was lower than Jeff in the organization, I was vulnerable. I was exhausted. I noticed that my drinking behaviors began to increase again, especially on the weekends. I was sleepless and frustrated living in fear that I would be fired and unemployed for the second time in my professional life. As a last minute effort, I contacted the Board President to talk through my concerns. I left a voicemail for him in which he called me back about one week later. He reassured me that Jeff was not trying to fire me, yet he used some of the same language word for word Jeff used to describe evaluation of my performance. I inferred from this conversation that the two of them had discussed the matter prior to our conversation.

I made sure to secure some external teaching opportunities that would secure a little income, then resigned. This was a difficult decision with significant consequences to me personally and professionally. When the savings and money from the teaching jobs ran out, I was still unemployed. I had to vacate my apartment due to being unable to pay rent. My son went to live with his mother full-time. This part crushed me. I was fortunate to have friends let me stay at their homes until I secured employment back in higher education and finally found housing I could afford after effectively being homeless for 5

months. Something was different this time. While I do believe my drinking was excessive during this period, it did not get to the same levels as it had done previously. I was determined not to fall into the same place of depression and self-abuse I had done previously.

Coping Differently

I was afraid that this pattern of work and personal hardships was permanent. I desperately looked for ways to change my trajectory. I had to find new sources of motivation. Part of this process started with listening to podcasts, then finding YouTube clips on successful habits, tips on overcoming difficult times, and listening to successful people in various fields interviewed about their stories. I held on to many of the themes of persistence in the face of difficult times. Themes of developing habits and routines made me think back to the best years of my life when my son was 3 and 4 years old. Part of my characteristics at that time was I had some basic routines that I did everyday (exercise, eating healthy, sleeping at least 7 hours etc.). These reflections matched up with much of what I heard in the podcast and on YouTube. I began to visualize things I wanted for my life and to remove negative influences of overconsumption of alcohol and lack of sleep. On one particular trip to Seattle, I met a mentor of mine for coffee and asked him how he handled challenging times in his high pressure leadership role in higher education. He told me something I will never forget—self talk. This was something I could do anytime and anywhere. A convergence of my past positive habits along with the new recommendations found through media gave me strength to keep moving forward in my health, career, parenting, and other parts of my life. Finally, I kept

in mind the critical question from my other mentor, “Why is this the best thing that could happen to me at this point in my life?”

Even the Police Can’t Stop Me Now

My encounters with police continued throughout this time in my life. There are many examples of being pulled over, but some stand out. One night I was arriving home after midnight from spending time with friends. I made it home without incident, parked my car roughly 30 yards from my apartment, locked my vehicle and headed home looking forward to some restful sleep. Suddenly, I heard footsteps barreling towards me accompanied by the booming voice of a man yelling “Stop, freeze.” In my confusion I turned around and raised my hands up, palms facing forward as I had learned in crisis intervention training that open palms displayed no weapons and allowed others to feel safe around you. As I looked to see who was yelling these commands, I witnessed a White male police officer about 6’3” running full speed in my direction with his flash light aimed in my direction. The light bounced around my upper body and face, but I was able to identify the police uniform he was wearing. My legs started to tremble uncontrollably. All I could think of was that I needed to sit very still as to not escalate whatever was in this officer’s mind. As he closed the distance, he asked clearly “What are you doing?” Confused, I replied “What?” He repeated himself more firmly this time as he caught his breath “What are you doing here?”

Me: “I live here? I’m going home” I responded with my voice shaking in shock and fear.

Officer: “You live HERE?”

Me: “Yes, I live right there,” pointing to my building that was now around 15 feet away.

Officer: "Let me see some identification."

I carefully reached for my wallet and clumsily handed him my driver's license. I found myself apologizing and explaining that I was frightened by him. The officer proceeded to ask me where my vehicle was, and I promptly escorted him towards its location. He informed me that he saw my vehicle driving in the area and needed to check it out. At the same time an additional police vehicle pulled up, but this time a Black woman officer. The officer handed her my identification and began to inspect the exterior of my vehicle with his flashlight. As he continued his search, she looked over my identification and asked me "What are you doing here?" in a neutral tone. I told her I lived here and pointed out my apartment building. I then asked her if she knew what was going on. She looked up and responded to me that there had been break-ins in the neighborhood. This wasn't the first time I heard this rationale from police officers when being questioned, so I gave her a look of disbelief. She immediately returned her gaze to my identification and we both remained silently together for another minute or so.

Finally, the original officer returned to me and told me that my temporary tag should not be taped to my rearview mirror. I explained the used car dealer had done this, but I would place it in whatever appropriate location he recommended. The other officer handed me back my driver's license and we parted ways. As I unlocked my front door, the fear and shakiness declined, but my anger grew tremendously. I could not believe what I had just experienced. Through all my shock and disbelief, I spent hours awake trying to recall the interaction looking for something I did wrong. This was an impossible exercise in that I could not find one rational explanation as to why I was detained walking to my own home. Their repeated question of "what are you doing here?" kept ringing in

my head. My thought response over and over resulted in words I never said out loud to them: “I live here. You just work here!” The feelings of frustration, anger, sadness, and more continued to course through my body. Eventually, I calmed down enough to sleep, only to wake up thinking about the reason for that late interaction with the officers.

Strangely, the death of Michael Brown at the hands of former Ferguson officer Darren Wilson signaled the end direct police interactions with me. Having a teenage son enduring what he did only a few years younger than Michael Brown brought a sense of hypervigilance regarding law enforcement. I remember having multiple conversations with my son regarding how to interact in safe ways with police since he was getting close to attaining his driver’s license. Strangely, however, my interactions with police all but disappeared when driving my vehicle or in any other situation after the killing of Michael Brown. The world responded to the shooting of this unarmed teenager, and the police in the city and counties of St. Louis seemed to tamper down their regular behavior of pulling me over. I had been pulled over in multiple counties for expired temp tag violations prior to the Ferguson incident, but my experience with temp tags in the future did not garner the same attention. Part of me felt a sense of ease start to increase around the police.

Car Break In

My final encounter with police reversed its pattern of being non-campus officers. I locked my keys in my car, and a uniformed parking attendant from the university I worked at in St. Louis. While parking my car, I made an error in locking my keys in my center console. Fortunately, there was a parking enforcement vehicle nearby, so I requested assistance from the person in the driver’s seat. He, a White male in his 50s

wearing his university parking services uniform graciously agreed to help me out. After some brief paperwork, the employee started working on attempting to unlock my vehicle with a very large metal instrument and some other tools. After a number of unsuccessful attempts, I started helping him by looking into my own vehicle and guiding his efforts. We had been at this effort with little success when I noticed a university police vehicle drive up.

My assumption of their interaction and what I was looking for was an officer connected to the university checking on his counterpart to see if any assistance was needed. The two men exchange a few words that I could not hear. The officer seemed to have a disillusioned laugh, shook his head, and then drove off. I didn't think anything of it, since I was likely more embarrassed of the mistake I made in haste to get to work. The parking employee said something inaudible to me. I asked him to repeat himself, and he shared "somebody called [campus police] saying someone was trying to break into a vehicle. Didn't they see my truck?" His *Parking & Transportation* vehicle was parked two spaces over and he had his uniform on. However, I believe he was wrong about his assumption on why the campus police were called. I attempted to smile and shake my head in agreement while disguising my pain and disappointment. I felt a weight on my chest realizing that someone called the university police because of my presence, assuming that at 8:30am, we were breaking into my own vehicle. I sat there watching three more police vehicles pull up and then drove off. I recognized one of the sergeants whom I've known for years showed up then waived at me as he drove off. The shame began to pile up as I realized my race was the most likely part of this situation that would warrant campus police being called. The parking employee didn't see race as a factor, but

I saw it. I'm almost certain the police officers quickly recognized it quickly. The member of my university community who made the call saw race. Amazingly, I was the only one likely not looking for race as a factor, even to the moment where the police showed up. And yet, race showed up in my vision field despite my lack of focus on its presence.

What I found challenging about these experiences is there were many times throughout all of these cases where I tried to rationalize the behavior of law enforcement, store clerks, and my fellow civilians living in these varied states. The constant energy of trying to make sense of unreasonable interaction was tiring. Going through each of these experiences left me with the baggage of having to make sense of my place in society at large and in my community immediately. There were times where I even began to take responsibility for these interactions. Maybe my rim covers on my car were too menacing or fit a particular profile which resulted into me changing parts of my own vehicle to fit in. These efforts didn't fix it. Being the Assistant Dean at a prominent local liberal arts college in Iowa could not stop these interactions. Even the way I dressed had no bearing on whether or not I could fit the profile. While I cannot cover not cover every interaction with police or community policing, I can say these interactions seemed to have had negative effects on me mental, emotional, and physical being throughout the years.

The Last Personal Straw

My final hardship came at the end of 2017. What was truly out of character during this hardship was how I handled this time of my life. I was working for my current higher education institution when I began dating a woman. I was living with a roommate at this time, but hastily decided to move into the condominium of this person. During this time, I ended up selling or donating all my furniture in order to make this transition easier. The

relationship ended in December of 2017 which left me without a home for the second time in my adult life. Instead of turning to alcohol and drugs (although I was no longer involved in sobriety groups), I asked a friend to sleep on his couch for a couple of weeks. I was able to secure an apartment and slowly rebuild. My car had been towed, and I neglected to get it out of impound since my previous partner had two vehicles I could access. By the time I found myself on my friend's couch, I owned nothing. My supervisor loaned me an air mattress which served as the only useable furniture I owned. Instead of calling for help from friends in the form of money and goods, I decided that I was going to move forward from this serviceable apartment on my own. I was fearful, but I decided to act in courage. This included eliminating my complaining about my current circumstances.

I began to eliminate social media attention from my daily routine. In fact, I returned to old routines from the early years of my marriage to my son's mother since those were the times where I was personally and professionally excelling. In addition, I asked myself the critical question my mentor had posed to me years earlier, "Why is this the best thing that could happen to me at this point in my life?" The answers to this question were more than the negative situation I was in once again. I was grateful for a roof over my head, great friends, a St. Louis Metro pass provided by my employer that I could access public transportation with, and my employment itself. When my friend Zoe offered to take me to work several days a week, I offered her my parking pass for her services to cover the cost for premiere parking on campus. I began to listen to podcasts and motivational speakers on a daily basis. I began to work daily and sometimes moment to moment to eliminate negative thoughts that I was deserving of my situation at that

time. This eventually turned to goal setting for my financial, spiritual, personal, academic, and professional life. As I focused on this daily, my choices I made were consistently in alignment with these new positive messages. Even when I encountered my last interaction with police or made a less than wise decision, I did not stay in a negative emotional state. I returned to the new narrative I created for myself, supported by friends and family who were never left supporting me with their presence.

The result of this effort turned into a cash bonus at work in which I secured a vehicle, a promotion at work, and a stronger sense of who I was despite what I or the world would do to push me in a different direction. In fact, these habits stay with me even though I am in a more secure place in all areas today. When I reconnected with my PhD advisor, I had a new sense of purpose with goals to reach. My actions matched these goals and most things not in line with these goals (behavior, relationships, etc.) have continued to be eliminated for my life. This is where my dissertation journey began. I wanted to understand what the previous 7 years meant in the context of my upbringing and present situation.

Discussion

The aim of this chapter is not to wrap a happy ending around my stories. The goal of this writing was to understand what I went through as it related to the research questions of what was my experiences that contributed to Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF) as a Black Male administrator and how did I cope with RBF? The racialized and personal experienced continued to happen over a lifespan resulting in disastrous outcomes. Woo (2018) states “Racial discrimination is often more pervasive and severe across time and contexts for racial/ethnic minorities than it is for dominant racial groups” (p. 769). While

all humans go through personal and professional setbacks, the racial discrimination simultaneously served as a foundation and cap to both areas in my life. The chapter begins with setting the context of my second divorce in a tumultuous relationship. While most people go through difficult personal setback, the convergence of a troubled home life, an unsupportive work environment, and my decision to increase my consumption of alcohol converged into a series of poor coping strategies.

DeCuir-Gunby et al. (2020) describe two forms of coping strategies: adaptive and maladaptive. During my second marriage timeline, I began to incorporate maladaptive coping strategies in which they describe as “known as disengagement coping strategies, are negative or unhealthy approaches that may, in fact, increase stress” (p. 494). The repeated stressors in and out of the workplace required some form or response on my part. Unfortunately, this resulted in a daily drinking habit that spiraled out of control after the divorce. The consequences of this behavior resulted in a deep depression followed by bad decisions and marked increased stress. In the workplace, I lost the trust of my staff who were already primed to challenge me at every point. My supervisor’s behaviors were not aimed at understanding my concerns but pushing me out of my role. Although I had kept a clean criminal record to this point in my life, my new encounters with law enforcement were consistently a result of decisions and behaviors I made. Nurius et al. (2015) adds to this argument with claiming “this cascade of adversities over the life course weakens opportunities for stable social supports, ability to obtain professional help, and maintenance of healthy habits; all of which collectively and progressively chip away at psychological well-being” (p. 149). Power, money, and career could not effectively mitigate the psychological toll these experiences had on me.

Black Male Manager Experiences

Moving up in my field of higher education administration could not protect me from inappropriate behaviors from superiors. The mistreatment and challenges I received from supervisees were unexpected. When I endured slights as an entry level professional from leadership members in and out of my department, an erosion of safety commenced. Somehow, I concluded that I would be protected from this as I moved up the ranks. Research by Davidson and Friedman (1998) concluded “black managers in our samples had more experience with unjust acts than the white managers; they reported higher levels of past injustices, higher levels of expected future injustices, and greater mistrust” (p. 175). From a supervisee yelling at me that I was a “horrible supervisor” to my staff challenging race-related hiring decisions, no amount of positional authority could protect me from any direction. It reminded me of a story I heard of a former Black male dean school who shared how he was asked to park someone’s car outside of his conference hotel. He told me this experience reinforced for him that he should never think he had “arrived” despite his career position. While hearing this story from him in graduate school, my lived experience of increasing in title and salary affirmed this idea that my race was something that would continue to negate whatever social position I attained.

These experiences were emotional in nature. I experienced feelings of frustration, anger, sadness, and helplessness in dealing with employees, colleagues, and higher ranking administrators. The erosion of my professional and personal confidence began to take its toll quietly. I could not outweigh my race, and the world would remind me repeatedly. DeCuir-Gunby et al. (2020) describe “attempts to mentally, emotionally, and physically remove stressors, this form of coping can result in the following: the

suppression or internalization of feelings (e.g. social withdrawal, self-criticism), physiological consequences (e.g. high blood pressure), feeling isolated, and refusing to directly confront the racism experienced (e.g. problem avoidance), among others” (p. 494). These consequences are in line with the effects of RBF, and I experienced some form of these and more. My negative experiences as a Black manager matches the research as well. James (2000) states in her study about Black managers “the data suggest that blacks in this sample were treated differently than whites, and this differential treatment adversely affected important work-related experiences and outcomes” (p. 504). In my conversations with White manager colleagues in the same or similar roles, these types of experiences were not reported. Acknowledging that all managers endure some form of boundary testing, the forms of conflict I experienced felt very different than those shared by my White colleagues. Additionally, surveillance was not part of their shared experience as well.

Leadership and Hypersurveillance

Hypersurveillance was not an act perpetrated by law enforcement alone. I selected stories throughout this research to give examples of both civilian, colleague, and law enforcement racialized surveillance throughout my lifespan. Berrey (2015) regarding surveillance, states the use of this term “not only to the formalized, regimented forms of observation, such as with undercover agents and cameras, but also to the ways in which people are regularly monitored and disciplined in their everyday routines” (p. 103). The impact of staff members observing and questioning my motives related to work, campus community members questioning my presence, and my interactions with the police all served as continued racial and traumatic assaults. Sewell et al. (2016) describe this

hypersurveillance and its impact as “an environmental stressor... has an effect on the psychological and physical health of Blacks. Race-based discriminatory practices lead to higher rates of anxiety, depression, and stress, in addition to higher rates of hypertension and heart disease in the population” (p. 297). While some people generally feel nervous around law enforcement, various trauma, crisis, conflict, and repetitive encounters with law enforcement contributed to my hypervigilance.

Cornwell et al. (2017) describe anxious hypervigilance as “marked by sensitized sensory-perceptual processes and attentional biases to potential danger cues in the environment” (p. 447). During the time my drinking was increasing, my physical and mental health were impacted. There were few places if any where I could fully relax. As the chief housing officer, conflicts were experienced on all sides. In my personal life, my marriage was dissolving chaotically. In my transitional spaces, constant police monitoring resulted in my guarded state. The resulting increase in anxiety overwhelmed me. I was prescribed anti-anxiety drugs, depressed and bed-ridden at times, and unable to manage the mundane stress of work conflict. My decision to drink and eventually try new drugs worsened things. A feedback loop of bad decisions, negative consequences, increased anxiety and depression, and more bad decisions moved me to a dangerous place. Waking up after my arrest put me in a position where I had to make a decision. I needed to continue down that path of despair, or something needed to change. I also needed to accept the world’s treatment of me wasn’t the thing that was going to change. I had no control over that. I needed to change.

Change

There were many slow changes during my time of recovery. Part of this was a struggle to make sense of all that I had gone through personally and professionally. I was unaware of the concept of RBF until returning to my effort to re-enroll in school. The need to change also meant I needed to find new coping mechanisms. Unknowing, I began more adaptive coping strategies. DeCuir-Gunby et al. (2020) define this as “the positive or healthy approaches to addressing stress” (p. 494). Part of this included seeking support the Alcoholics Anonymous and seeking counseling. They go on to state:

Establishing personal and professional support networks was also a productive way of coping with race-related stress at work for many participants. While some found their stress levels to be reduced through communication with family and friends, others found that it was the support they received from professionals who were in similar positions or worked in similar contexts that helped them to successfully navigate the higher education workplace contexts in which they were employed. (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020, p. 499)

My conversations with mentors and friends was invaluable. From recommendations on reframing my understanding of my experiences to tips like self-talk, each of these conversations were extremely invaluable. Some of this advice was given during my time of divorce and resignation from my job. Some of this advice and support was provided during and after my crisis when life was improving. All of it was critical. I could not rely solely on one source of support in and outside of the workplace. Books, podcasts, YouTube, and new routines were added to fortify my improvement. All of these people and resources helped me when I encountered future issues.

Whether new conflicts with my new supervisor in the nonprofit or continued police interactions, I learned new ways to process and cope with these challenges. This chapter focused on the final timeline around my eventual burnout related to Racial Battle Fatigue and the consequences thereafter. When writing these stories, I felt compelled to note changes in how I reacted to these personal and professional trials as a comparison. What I found is the patterns of experiences in my youth, early career, and now remain the same. How I respond has changed. The costs of my reactions have had consequences that still impact me to this day. However, I am grateful for being able to identify what I went through as a form of preparation for the rest of my life and career.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

Storytelling has long been an interest of mine. While many cultures use this practice as a way of entertaining, teaching important life lessons, and much more, the use of storytelling in research has a particular draw to me. Through storytelling, new narratives shed light on new learning. We can see this on a micro-level (e.g. therapy sessions) or a macro-level (e.g. world history) where stories are used to create meaning and develop understanding of specific experiences or larger phenomena. In consideration of this study, I considered interviewing Black male higher education administrators to learn about their experiences with Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF). However, it became apparent that my personal experience was a readily available and rich place to start. The research questions were workshopped and clarified through my exit course, conversations with friends/mentors, and finally my dissertation committee. In combining all of this feedback, this study was created to connect my stories to the broader work related to RBF. What rose to the surface through this study was a broader range of focus on the topic of RBF than traditionally found in the literature.

As I began to recount my stories related to my career in similar ways to current research, I kept being drawn to experiences outside of my work experience. This allowed me to draw the conclusion that I could not separate these areas of my life in relations to RBF. While this broadened the scope of my study, the goal was to make a direct connection to patterns, observations, and experiences related to my experience leading to this form of burnout and my discovery of healthier ways to sustain my life and career. I

realized that separating these worlds left a gap in the literature that I wanted to fill. It is with this perspective that the autoethnographic approach made the best sense to utilize.

Autoethnography

In choosing the autoethnographic approach to this study, a decision was made to address the questions utilizing a lens focused on self as both the researcher and researched. The goal in this effort was to connect my personal experiences to the broader phenomenon of RBF relating to Black male higher education administrators. In defining autoethnography, Wall (2006) describes the method as allowing “author to write in a highly personalized style, drawing on his or her experience to extend understanding about a societal phenomenon” (p. 146). Relating to connecting my personal experiences to RBF at a broader level, Wall goes on to state this method’s intent “to acknowledge the inextricable link between the personal and the cultural and to make room for nontraditional forms of inquiry and expression” (p. 146). Ellis et al. (2011) describe this approach as “As a method, autoethnography combines characteristics of autobiography and ethnography” (p. 275). This method allowed me to take a deeper look into experiences I had encountered reflexively to make sense of them for myself as the author and provide the reader a new way of understanding RBF. The process of speaking and writing the stories, analysis, rewriting, and connecting to the broader theory required a level of rigor and thoroughness that was time consuming and emotionally draining at times. It is what Butz and Besio (2009) describe as a chance to scrutinize, publicize, and reflexively rework their own self-understandings as a way to shape understandings of and in the wider world” (p. 1660). They go on to state,

“The point of narrative ethnography is primarily epistemological; it is a reflexive effort by field researchers to analyze how they are situated in relation to the people and worlds they are studying, and to the fields of power that constitute those relationships, and is a way to describe the situatedness and partiality of the academic knowledge that results” (p. 1666).

The autoethnographic approach allowed me author to as much as possible remove myself from my lived experiences in order to make sense of how they best fit the larger world of higher education for Black male administrators. Through this process, broader conclusions on the experience of RBF and coping for Black administrators may be gleaned.

This approach to research allowed for depth and breadth of in that it “expands and opens up a wider lens on the world, eschewing rigid definitions of what constitutes meaningful and useful research” (Ellis et al., 2011p. 275). Ellis et al (2011) elaborate by stating,

When researchers do autoethnography, they retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity. However, in addition to telling about experiences, autoethnographers often are required by social science publishing conventions to analyze these experiences (p. 276).

The ability to focus on a range of stories made for rich through lines, themes, and connections that have the potential for broader implications of experience and practice within higher education. Through that lens, this study’s exploration of RBF adds to the broader research.

RBF and its Manifestation

Smith et al. (2007) describe RBF as “the result of constant physiological, psychological, cultural, and emotional coping with racial microaggressions in less-than-ideal and racially hostile or unsupportive environments (campus or otherwise)” (p. 555). These microaggressions are demonstrated throughout this study, starting with my youth, moving towards the undergraduate experience, and culminating in my career while being the chief housing officer. The repetitive unjustified interactions with police, the racial indignations and slights from fellow citizens, and the challenges presented by peers, colleagues, supervisors, and supervisees took their toll on my ability to persist in my personal and professional settings. Smith et al. (2007) refer to this as the “mental, emotional, and physiological symptoms of racial battle fatigue can develop from exposure to chronically stressful race-related conditions” (p. 555). This does not absolve the poor coping mechanisms I endured, but the literature addresses this as well.

Smith et al. continue to explain “Depending on the coping responses, adaptive or maladaptive, African Americans will experience racial battle fatigue in varying frequencies and degrees that directly affects psychological and physiological stress response and related health outcomes” (p. 557). Lack of sleep, excessive drinking, anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, and many other examples were illustrated throughout the study. While hard to make sense of at the time, I can reflectively identify this same behavior in Black male colleagues across the country. These maladaptive coping behaviors and stress responses can have disastrous effects if not addressed by the institutions and individuals. Awareness of a lifetime of surveillance, racial slights, family trauma, and mundane microaggressions is the responsibility of everyone involved in

higher education. We cannot say we are effective leaders, institutions, and practitioners without acknowledging and identifying ways to support Black males entering and moving through their careers.

Coping Mechanisms

There were several areas identified as adaptive and positive coping mechanisms that helped me work through my moment of burnout. The support systems allowed for what DeCuir et al. (2020) refer to as “healthy psychological functioning” (p. 492). When job leadership was inaccessible and unsupportive, other areas were vitally important to pull me from this dark place. This includes friends, mentors, therapy, video and, audio content, faith communities, and more. In line with the research of DeCuir et al. (2020) in describing “that African American typically utilize emotional coping strategies (i.e. relying upon family, friends, church, other personal networks) when they are in distress” (p. 494). While their work offers additional coping strategies, the research demonstrates the sole responsibility of surviving RBF on the individual experiencing it. I agree with their call for finding interventions (p. 505), there is a broader scope in which mitigating RBF can be addressed. This responsibility falls within the institutions (e.g. law enforcement, education, etc.) and people who make up these institutions. There needs to be a *both/and* approach to this issue. Yes, it is important to help individuals anticipate burnout and find healthy coping mechanisms. Gardner et al. (2014) state that “Mentoring has been identified as a method to both facilitate retention of minority students and promote professional growth and development of minority professionals” (p. 239). Earlier in this literature, the also acknowledge that higher education institutions continue to struggle to increase representation” (p. 236) when it comes to Blacks in higher

education administration. The mentors are there, but the numbers may not be able to support the need. This demonstrates that the effort needs to be broader.

Other Interesting Themes

Throughout the analysis process of this study, some unexpected themes arose. These include 1) Power Dilemmas, 2) Unmet Expectations and 3) Family Impact. *Power Dilemmas* represent a series of moments through my professional life where I acquired power and influence through promotion and growth of my professional reputation. During the height my early to mid-career, I served on national committees, presented regularly at many regional and national conferences, consulted for various institutions, and made more money than any other time to that point in my career. Despite this level of power and influence, I was not protected by the continued racial slights, surveillance by police (and community members), and challenges to my authority by peers and supervisees. I continue to struggle with this idea seeing that many of my White colleagues (especially males) have not experienced the same dissonance as they have moved up the professional and personal status ranks. It is my contention that the difference is primarily race, and the intersection of race and gender in my case. The stories that make up this study are only a fraction of all experiences I endured within the framework of the research questions. In reviewing my original writings and data analysis, it is clear the increases in power did not mitigate experiences building into my experience with RBF.

Unmet Expectations relates to the psychological dissonance related to my lived experience both personally and professionally and my personal definition of success. Success at the start of my career was defined as continuing to advance in professional

position and salary while being able to contribute to the greater good. While most of this definition still rings accurate to me, what I expected to accompany success was not the case. I expected receiving the title of Assistant Dean/Director of Residence Life in Iowa as a marker of life being better. I was quickly reminded with the mount of surveillance I received from law enforcement that I was just a Black man in a car to outsiders. For brevity, I did not describe the slights I received on campus as well in Iowa by other administrators and staff. However, they often mirrored the dismissive nature of my time at this institution. I expected more from the campus and city community, but this was not the case. Gardner et al. (2014) describe even the “city in which the institution is located seemed to have an effect on the climate of the institution” (p. 241). St. Louis, MO and Cedar Rapids, IA were not unique in this regard. What I expected and what I experienced were very different. This dissonance continued on in my return to higher and higher positions and salary in the subsequent years (2006-2013). At some point, the emotional toll and energy required to hold onto hope for things to change wore me down. I was tired, confused, and deflated. The impact of personal life and family was no different.

Being a child of violent marriage, divorce, abandonment from my father, and becoming a young father all had an impact on my sense of self. This *Family Impact* had deep roots in retrospect. My father was abandoned by his father from what I understand. He repeated this same behavior with my siblings and me. Being married and having a child was partially a way to work through much of this early loss. However, there is still an impact this first series of major family trauma continued and continues to have on my life. On the other side, going through two divorces was traumatic. The difficulty of the divorce added to a personal narrative of being destined to fail. While divorce is not

relegated to the Black male experience, my divorces added to a foundation of hurt and pain. Raising a son to adulthood had its own set of challenges.

The challenges of raising a son were beyond the typical issues of parenting. There were issues related to being a parent of a Black boy (now man). I had to demonstrate when being pulled over by police for no apparent reason how to interact with law enforcement to stay safe. I worked hard to make sure he would get the best public education available. I made sure to be actively involved in his academics so his teachers and administrators knew what “type” of Black family he came from. None of those efforts could protect him. When he received his license, my anxiousness around him “driving while black” increased. However, I knew I had taught him how to interact with law enforcement safely. This did not stop him from experiencing having a GUN pointed to his face by police officers breaking up a high school house party in Ladue. The family impact converges with *unmet expectations* in that no matter what I did professionally, I had to accept I could never protect him growing up as a Black male in society. He is in college now. He has protested against the recent killings of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and George Floyd and other in Phoenix, AZ, San Diego, CA, and Cedar Rapids, IA. I have to reconcile the need to let go and do my part to make sure he lives in a world that is psychologically and physically safer than I did. Yet I’m afraid of my limited impact in this part of his life. This is why these experiences are deeply personal and need to be illuminated.

Potential for Future Research

Future research on the experience of Black male higher education administrators and RBF is warranted. What the career trajectories are for people in this demographic?

What are their life histories? How do higher education institutions continue to exact racial trauma on this population are all areas worthy of further exploration.

Recommendations for better practice at every institutional level needs to be broaden beyond traditional forms of qualitative and quantitative research. A call for the stories of those impacted in all aspects of higher education (students, faculty, staff) around racism and its impact needs to be part of this growing research. The narrative has a powerful opportunity to, in an organized way, highlight other ways of knowing and expanding the epistemological definition of research. Furthermore, this research needs to be accompanied with measurable actionable goals. It is my hope that the most recent attention to issues of race will have a continued energy in erasing the plight of all people.

Conclusion

Throughout my life, I've tried to make sense of the behavior of law enforcement, store clerks, colleagues, supervisees, and others whom I experienced racialized conflict and confrontations. Going through each of these experiences left me with the baggage of having to make sense of my place in society at large and in my community immediately. There were times where I even began to take responsibility for these interactions. When pulled over for the third time in my new vehicle I changed my rim covers on my thinking they might have appeared menacing or fit a particular profile worth surveilling. I monitored my emotions more closely to make others comfortable. I even paid attention to what parts of my personality showed up in various environments to avoid race being an issue. These efforts didn't fix the problem. Being the Assistant Dean at a prominent local liberal arts college in Iowa could not stop these interactions. Even the way I dressed had no bearing on whether or not I could fit the profile. While I cannot cover not cover every

interaction with police or community policing, I can say these interactions seemed to have had negative effects on me mental, emotional, and physical being throughout the years.

While much of the literature around Racial Battle Fatigue focuses on students and faculty experience in higher education, I am arguing for recognition of the larger lived context vital to consider while exploring this topic. Racism for students, faculty, and higher education administration does not manifest only within higher education. My educated assumption is that race-conscious Black campus community members enter these institutions with racialized traumas in the various forms explored in this dissertation.

There are many benefits for continuing to highlight this type of research. Sewell et al. (2016) state the “costs outweigh benefits, hyper-surveillance is a public health concern for individuals and communities targeted by police” (p. 297). James (2000) research found that, “black managers reported being promoted at a slower rate and receiving less psychosocial support than their white counterparts” (p. 503). And Gardner et al. (2014) recommend “Higher education administrators can assist AASAAs in developing social networks or webs of relationships to facilitate social integration, social support, and to provide emotional support such as advice on ethical and administrative issue” (p. 248). Finally, Jackson (2004) states “overall institutions are having better success diversifying their student body than their administrative staff” (p. 16). There is a need. The research is calling for this. William A. Smith called for this. And now, I am joining the call.

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